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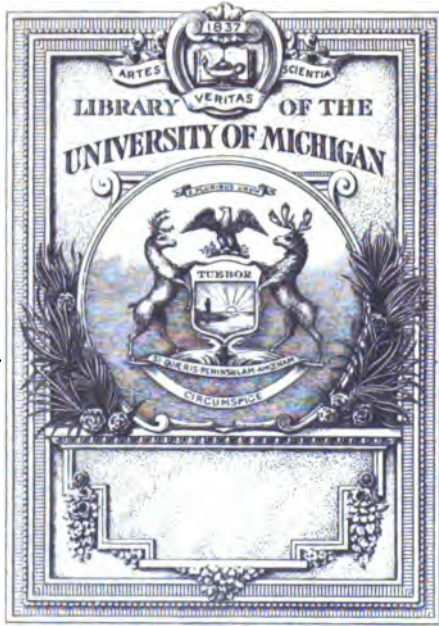
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NINIAN JAMIESON

JOHN DAVIDSON

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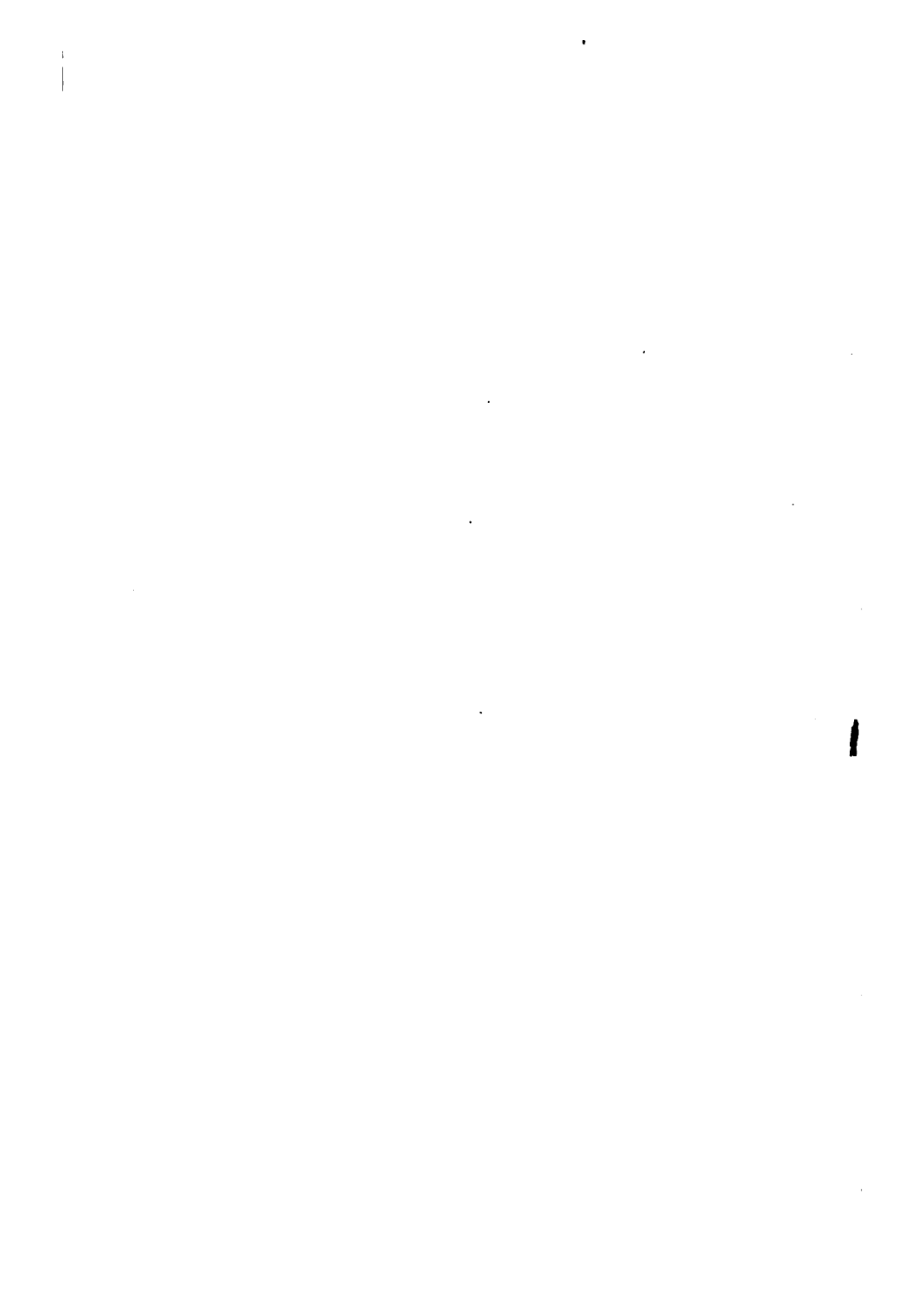
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**NINIAN JAMIESON  
AND  
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**BY**

**JOHN DAVIDSON**



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# NINIAN JAMIESON

## CHAPTER I

THEORIES! THEORIES!

‘It is reported that Mr Ninian Jamieson, Provost of Mintern, has succeeded in making diamonds by an entirely original process.’

On a morning in July some years ago a red-haired man noticed this announcement in a newspaper, and with more than ordinary interest, because he was seated in a train from Edinburgh for the North on his way to Mintern.

‘Ninian Jamieson.’ There was a quaint flavour about the name, indicating eccentricity in the bearer of it, thought the red-haired man.

‘Odd people always have odd names,’ he

meditated ; and addressing mentally a handsome man who sat opposite, and who was the only other occupant of the compartment, he thought he heard himself saying, and admired his speech, 'Look at Lord Monboddo. Nature formed him an eccentric, but he came into the world with the ordinary name of Burnet. Fate, however, was not to be outdone. It made him a lawyer, and a wise one too, and raised him to the bench ; and his abnormal chin, and his belief in mermaids, and satyrs, and the quodrumaneous origin of man, preposterous in an advocate called James Burnet, are all reconcilable with the title. Look at Duncornet, Scarron, Suwarrow, Melancthon, Dobrowsky ! They must have been eccentric, and so is Ninian Jamieson.'

'On the other hand,' continued the red-haired man, passionately, though still mentally, to himself, his face flushing with excitement, and his eyes fixed on the handsome man opposite, 'look at the great men, as far removed from eccentricity as eccentricity is from commonplace ! How their names

roll out! Cromwell, Shakespeare, Milton, Bonaparte, Nelson, Goethe! Listen to them,' he cried aloud, overcome by his enthusiasm ; 'Hugo, Carlyle, Bismarck, Calderon, Plato, Barbarossa, Charlemagne—'

'And Ninian Jamieson,' said the handsome man, as the other paused, not having a name quite ready.

'Ninian Jamieson!' exclaimed the red-haired man. 'How, sir! Can you read my thoughts?'

'But you were speaking aloud.'

'Was I?'

'Yes; you enumerated a list of great men, and came to a stop, whereupon I suggested a modern.'

'Ninian Jamieson.'

'Yes.'

'Is he a great man?'

'Indisputably.'

The red-haired man sat up stiffly, and examined the handsome man from top to toe. He felt abashed, for he himself was a little stubby man, and was quite aware of his inferior appearance; whereas the



other was a tall man, well proportioned, and with a very fine face.

‘Do you know this Ninian Jamieson?’ asked the little man, fiercely, having recovered from his momentary confusion.

‘I know him well.’

‘You do! Then,’ said the little man, pointing to the newspaper, ‘how can you reconcile the fact of his being a great man with the fact that he is a provost? Is there any book published with the title ‘Provosts Who Were Great Men’ or ‘Provosts Who Became Great Men’? Sir, there is something incompatible between greatness and the provostship of a Scotch burgh. Take my word for it, men are born to be provosts just as they are born to be great; and just as great men are born with great names, so those men who are intended for provosts are born with names which have the true municipal ring; and I make bold to say that there is no surname in Scotland which, in every letter of it, bears more distinct impress of provostship than Jamieson.’

The little man stopped, out of breath, and the handsome man smiled blandly.

‘And you will allow me to state further,’ continued the little man, when he had recovered his breath, ‘that you are possibly labouring under a common hallucination which confounds eccentricity with greatness. As surely as a man called Jamieson becomes, in favourable circumstances, a provost, so surely will an individual christened Ninian be eccentric in a high degree. I have thus stated three theories : first, great men have always names which sound majestically ; second, eccentric people have always eccentric names ; third, there are certain names towards which municipal honours never fail to gravitate. Ninian Jamieson is an illustration of the second and third theories, and, negatively, of the first.’

The little man folded his arms and threw himself back in the corner of the carriage, his red hair standing on end, and his grey eyes radiating theories. The handsome man continued to smile blandly.

‘And,’ said the little man, tilting forward with a new argument, ‘who ever heard of a great man making diamonds?’

‘It depends,’ said the other quietly, ‘for what purpose he makes them.’

‘Purpose!’ sneered the red-haired man. ‘No purpose could justify a man’s making diamonds.’

‘How so?’

There was no idea except contradiction in the little red-haired man’s head, so that he was at a loss for a moment or two to support the statement which the handsome man had queried.

‘Because it can’t be done,’ he said, at length, with triumph.

‘But it has been done,’ the other insisted.

‘I’ll believe it when I see the diamonds, and the making of the diamonds, and the stuff out of which the diamonds are made, and not till then,’ said the red-haired man.

‘You wouldn’t take anybody’s word for it?’

‘I take nobody’s word for anything.’

‘You don’t know this Ninian Jamieson, do you?’

‘No.’

‘Have you ever been in Mintern?’

‘No; but I’m going there now.’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed the handsome man, with an expression of satisfaction.

‘Yes. Is there anything strange in my going to Mintern?’

‘Nothing; except that I am going there too.’

‘You are! Then you can tell Ninian Jamieson, provost and diamond-maker, what I think of him,’ said the little man, rapidly developing a passionate hatred for this dignitary of Mintern whose name he had not heard till that morning.

‘I’ll not fail to do so,’ said the handsome man. ‘He’ll be very much concerned to hear that his name indicates that he need never aspire beyond eccentricity and municipality, for he believes himself to be a great man, fit for a much higher destiny than a provostship.’

‘You can tell him from me that he has reached his zenith.’

‘But he’s only twenty-eight.’

‘That’s his eccentricity. I told you! Who but a man called Ninian could, or would, be a provost at twenty-eight?’

‘But I don’t think he’ll agree with your theory about names.’

‘I can’t help that,’ said the little man with a snort, and a tremendous emphasis on the personal pronoun.

‘You see,’ said the handsome man, ‘there are a goodly number of great men whose names have a very ordinary or even inferior sound.’

‘Mention six,’ burst out the little man, like a gun that had been over-loaded.

‘Dante, Burns, Pitt, Stuart, Paul, Turner,’ replied the handsome man, rapidly and regularly discharging the names like a six-chambered revolver.

‘But, my dear sir, don’t you perceive,’ said the little man, very much in earnest, ‘that these names can’t go into the same category with those I mentioned? Dante is perhaps on the border line; but a line there must be, and it is better to keep the class of greatest men very select. There’s the test, sir. Has

the name a majestic sound? No? Out with it, then; it doesn't belong to our list. It has? Write it up in letters of gold. It's infallible. Man'—he became familiar in his zeal—'man, there's the postulate; great men have always names that sound majestically. You can't get over that. And who's this Paul?'

'Paul, the Apostle.'

'Pardon—pardon!' cried the little man. 'No Bible characters! no Bible characters! And what Stuart's this?'

'James Stuart, the poet-king of Scotland, who was the greatest ruler of his time.'

'Oh, but that'll never do! What about James Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh—and Eighth, if you like? No, no! When Nature produces a great man, she doesn't make eight of the name—she doesn't make eight of the name.'

With this the red-haired man gathered his legs up on the seat, and, rolling himself into a ball, waved his newspaper in triumph and settled down to read. He glanced over every column, some, by mistake, more than

once ; repeatedly his eye caught the news about Ninian Jamieson.

‘Ninian Jamieson, for the fifth time!’ he cried, untwisting himself, and bringing down both feet with a crash on the floor of the carriage, while he smote the newspaper between his hands as if it had been the diamond-maker’s cheek. Then he threw it to the other end of the compartment, and, arranging himself for another talk, asked of the handsome man, who watched him with a constant smile, what like Jamieson was.

‘What like would you suppose him to be?’ said the handsome man.

‘What like? Like a provost, of course—an eccentric provost and diamond-maker.’

‘And what like’s that?’

‘A little man, broad, with a paunch ; hair of no particular colour, getting grey already ; a wholesale grocer, perhaps—maybe a banker. Bemused himself when a boy with chemical tricks—read about the philosopher’s stone, and the elixir of life. Buys some platinum wire, and ammonia, and nitric acid, and a muffle-furnace, and charcoal ; hears of the

Glasgow diamonds, goes mad, and makes 'em too. Is that like him ?'

'Not particularly.'

'No ? He'll have a turned-up nose ; eyes small and dark ; face keen, though getting flabby ; married to a woman older than him-himself ; six children ; belongs to the Free Kirk. Eh ?'

'That's not particularly like him either.'

'Well, all I can say is this,' said the little man, thoroughly disgusted, 'that my description tallies exactly with his name and quality ; and if I'm not right there's something wrong, and he's not the man I took him for.'

'That's very probable.'

'But it's not probable,' said the little man, getting angry. 'Tell me the name and quality of a man, and I'll give you his physical appearance and his mental characteristics. Ninian Jamieson ought to be exactly like my description. If he's not—why, do you suppose the Fates never make mistakes ? Circumstances may go all wrong, as they sometimes do. I tell you



that a man's name, business, appearance and character are all interdependent ; and, if he knows one, a student of human nature and history can deduce the others. Ninian Jamieson is simply a necessary exception to prove the rule. Man alive, there's the theory. Don't you see? "The surname indicates the quality; the Christian name the character." Put two and two together and you get everything else.'

The handsome man, whose smile had been broadening during the last speech of his travelling companion, burst, at its conclusion, into a great laugh.

'What!' snorted the little man, starting to his feet, 'you laugh at me!'

The tall man did not heed the remonstrance ; he gave himself up to his laughter. He crowed and neighed, and went off into apoplectic gurglings and silences, only to explode again like the noise of a whole farmyard. In the climax of his fit he brought his hands down on the shoulders of the little man, and jerked out, 'You're too delightful!'

‘I’m too delightful!’ cried the little man, aghast. ‘Too delightful! Sir!’

Words failed him; so he withdrew to the other end of the compartment, seized the paper, and began to read the leaders furiously. The storm of laughter soon subsided in the tall man, but at the first stoppage of the train the little man bundled up his traps and left the compartment, shaking the dust of it from his feet.

At three minutes past eleven, precisely three minutes late, the train stopped at Mintern. The red-haired man got out with his two portmanteaus, his umbrella, his walking-stick, and his fishing-tackle. He looked about for a porter, but he could not distinguish an olive-green suit in the throng that filled the station.

‘What’s the meaning of this?’ he muttered. ‘Where have the people come from?’

All at once a cheer burst from the crowd.

The red-haired man looked about him in a state of bewilderment. Had royalty come

in the train with him? or who was this bowing gracefully as he stepped to the platform?

By heaven, it was his late companion! The crowd surged about him. Dozens of hands shook his. A hundred voices bellowed welcome. Quickly a bodyguard formed, and with difficulty a way was cloven to a carriage in attendance. There a confused tumult arose; the upshot being that the horses were led away, and a dozen men harnessed instead. The centre of a swaying mass, the carriage moved off. Shouts and laughter filled the air, in the midst of which the red-haired man distinguished juvenile voices crying, 'Gie's a deemannt!'

He grew pale—one would have said his very hair became less ruddy. He laid hold of a man, the last of the crowd, and, detaining him by main force, demanded who the hero was.

'The Provost,' was the answer.

'Ninian Jamieson?'

'Yes.'

The red-haired man relaxed his grasp, and

sank down on one of his portmanteaus. 'Revenge!' he muttered. 'Revenge!'

The study of the concrete floor of a country railway station is neither soothing nor distracting. The red-haired man discovered this in a few seconds, and looking up, saw a porter returning leisurely to his duty.

'I wish my traps taken to the Mintern Arms,' he said.

'Ta 'bus is waitin',' said the porter.

Soon everything was in—he was the sole passenger—and the 'bus in motion; but it had hardly started when it came to a standstill. The cause of the stoppage was immediately apparent.

Headed by a scratch flute-band, and surrounded by a crowd of boys and loafers, the Provost's carriage, drawn by the twelve volunteers, turned into the street in front of the 'bus. Ninian was bowing and smiling with the bored affability of a prince. He caught sight of the red-haired man, and bestowed on him a particularly gracious salute, to which the reply was a frown. Ninian observed the sulky expression on the brick-dust

face of the red-haired man, and stopped his carriage. He spoke a few words to his human team, and a couple of stalwart poachers, confounding utterly the driver, the boots, and the the red-haired man himself, transferred the luggage to the Provost's carriage, while a third, opening the door of the 'bus, invited its occupant to join Mr Jamieson and accompany him to his residence.

The red-haired man buttoned up his little corpulent figure in his shooting-jacket, pulled his cap down over his eyes, thrust his hands into his side pockets with violence, straining his jacket about his waist, and followed the Provost's messenger. A rolling laugh greeted him as he crossed the road, for the portentous frown he wore was very amusing. The more the crowd indulged its mirth, the fiercer grew his face, and the reciprocal action of the laughter and the frown reached a point of frenzy when the red-haired man stepped into the Provost's carriage, and flung himself down with his legs crossed defiantly and his arms tightly folded.

A brief consultation having been held by

the driver and the boots, they approached the carriage with some undefined intention of re-taking their prey. The hooting of the crowd, however, and the menacing attitude of the twelve human steeds, brought them to a halt. But Ninian Jamieson, anxious to get on, prevented any dispute by throwing some silver to the hotel officials, and the procession continued its way.

Although the Provost's house was not a furlong from the station, it took a quarter of an hour to reach it, partly owing to the winding avenue which led to it, but chiefly on account of the crowd, which, accompanying the carriage to the very door, hampered its progress at every step. Arrived there, the people seemed quite satisfied with their achievement, gave three ringing cheers for their chief magistrate, and retired in good order. The twelve men who had drawn the carriage received a shilling each. They loitered about in front of the house until the last of the crowd had vanished ; then, with the help of a servant they got away through the kitchen-garden by a back gate, and started

off for Ballany, a village two miles from Mintern, where they could drink the whole of the money themselves—a consummation impossible in Mintern, as each had many drouthy friends.

The little red-haired man handed his card to the Provost the moment they entered the house.

‘Mr Cosmo Mortimer. Ha!’ said the Provost, ‘you are then a great man?’

‘No,’ said Mortimer, ‘I’m not a great man—yet. My name was Hugh Smith. Now, as it is utterly impossible for a person called Hugh Smith to attain greatness of any kind, I changed my name to Cosmo Mortimer, and I am struggling to live up to it.’

‘It is a noble ambition,’ said Jamieson.

‘Well, it doesn’t matter whether it is or not. I want to talk to you.’

‘Won’t you wash your hands first?’

‘No.’

‘John, take these portmanteaus to the blue-room,’ said Jamieson to a footman dressed in Highland garb.

‘John,’ said Mortimer, ‘leave these port-

manteaus alone. Come, sir'—to Jamieson —'take me where I can talk to you.'

'As you please,' said Jamieson ; and he led Mortimer into his study.

'Be seated,' said Jamieson.

'No, sir ; I'll stand. Sir,' said Mortimer, sternly, 'you owe me an apology.'

'Do I?'

'You do.'

'I apologise, then,' said Jamieson, pleasantly.

Mortimer was overwhelmed. 'How!' he cried. 'For what do you apologise?'

'I don't know,' said Jamieson.

'Sit down, sir,' said Mortimer. 'Sit down. I want to talk to you.'

'It was for that I brought you here.'

'For what?'

'To have you talk to me.'

'Oh, wait till you hear what I've got to say!'

Mortimer leaned back and stretched his legs out. Resting his right heel upon his left toe, he swayed his feet from side to side, and began his speech.



'Mr Jamieson,' he said, with a slight frown, 'the promptness of your apology has disarmed me. Still, it is necessary that you should know for what you have apologised. You have apologised for six things: first, for being called Ninian; second, for being called Jamieson; third, for being Provost of Mintern; fourth, for being a diamond-maker; fifth, for laughing at me; sixth, for not telling me at once in the train that you were Ninian Jamieson, Provost of Mintern, and diamond-maker. Now, do you adhere to your apology?'

'I do,' said Jamieson. 'I apologise for each and all of these things.'

Mortimer was dissatisfied. An apology to be thoroughly enjoyed must be drawn like a tooth. It must be forthcoming only to invincible argument, or the dread of a horse-whip. To fling an apology in one's face is to repeat the insult in an intensified form. Mortimer knew that he himself would not apologise in such an off-hand way as Jamieson had done except to someone whom he regarded as of no account. He dreaded no-

thing more than sleeve-laughter, and he thought he heard the little fiend chuckling at Jamieson's right cuff. He was endeavouring to hit on some subtle expression which might open up the whole question again without seeming to do so, in order to test Jamieson's sincerity, when the latter laid before him a new aspect of the matter.

'And now,' he said, 'suppose you apologise to me.'

'What!' cried Mortimer, springing to his feet.

'There's no need for these explosions,' said Jamieson. 'I want you to talk to me, not to bellow at me. Sit down. Yes,' continued Jamieson; 'it has occurred to me that you might wish to express regret for having slandered a man whom you knew nothing about.'

'To what do you refer?' asked Mortimer, judicially.

'I refer,' said Jamieson, with his bland smile, 'to your detraction of myself.'

'I deny the detraction.'

Mortimer leaned back in his chair, built up his feet again, and prepared to discuss.

‘Explain yourself,’ said Jamieson.

‘I said you were eccentric: you are. I alleged that Jamieson was a provostal name; I repeat the allegation. I asserted that you weren’t a great man: I reassert it. I insisted that a diamond-maker couldn’t be a great man, and I stand to it. I described your appearance wrongly, but on your assuring me of that I immediately withdrew my description. I summed up by explaining to you that you were a freak of nature, or one of Fate’s mistakes—possibly a mixture of both; and I will defend these positions with my last breath.’

‘That’s very good,’ said Jamieson, laughing,

Mortimer was more dissatisfied than ever. He felt convinced that Jamieson was not taking him seriously. He had been slow to admit it, although the idea had been present from the beginning of his intercourse with the Provost. Now he determined to bring it to an issue.

‘What do you think of me?’ he asked bluntly.

Jamieson looked at him for half a minute, and then said, ‘I think you’ll do very well.’

‘Do!—do what?’

‘I’ll tell you after lunch.’

‘But I’ll not stay to lunch,’ said Mortimer, stoutly. ‘You’re a bully, sir, I see, as well as an eccentric, and you’re a young man, and you seem to be accustomed to have your way here. Doubtless you’re cock of the walk in Mintern, but you’ll not crow over me.’

The Provost rose and put his back against the door.

‘Have you business in Mintern?’ he asked.

‘Business!’ cried Mortimer. ‘Sir, I’m a gentleman.’

‘Then you’re here on pleasure?’

‘No, sir. I’m here to fish.’

‘As a duty?’ queried the Provost.

‘No; as sport,’ said Mortimer. ‘Sport, pleasure, duty, are three distinct things.’

‘Then you’ll stay with me as long as you

are in Mintern,' said the Provost. At the same time he took down a huge broadsword that hung beside the door, and flourished it about Mortimer's head. Mortimer winked and drew in his breath, but said nothing.

'John,' said the Provost, opening the door, 'take Mr Mortimer's portmanteaus to the blue-room.'

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## CHAPTER II

### THE 'DUNMYATT WHISKY'

LUNCH was served in a hall containing a long table, at the head of which was a daïs. Here Jamieson and Mortimer sat, while the servants, having set the dishes, took their places beneath the salt. Before each was a good-sized wooden bowl or cog containing porridge, a smaller cog with milk, and a horn spoon of very unfashionable dimensions. As soon as Jamieson had taken a first spoonful, all the servants began to sup without ceremony. Mortimer, who had no particular relish for porridge, devoured cogs and spoons, master and servants, with his eyes.

'Fa' tae, man,' said Jamieson.

'What?' cried Mortimer.'

He knew the Scotch dialect well enough, but was so unprepared for it that, although

he heard the words distinctly, he had no sense of their meaning.

‘Don’t you like porridge?’ asked Jamieson.

Mortimer determined that a wariar conduct than his had been for the last hour or two might be advisable. The hall in which they were had quite the appearance of an armoury, with targets and claymores, blunderbusses and pistols, on all the walls. He was beginning also to doubt the sanity of his entertainer. So, while he would have preferred to propound a theory regarding porridge which occurred to him at the moment, he said, in answer to the Provost’s question, ‘I like it very much indeed, but I am so astonished at all I see that I’m afraid I’ve lost my appetite.’

‘Try it,’ said the Provost. ‘We’re noted for our porridge here.’

Mortimer took one spoonful and then another. ‘It’s the best porridge I ever tasted,’ he said, with genuine satisfaction. ‘It’s very different,’ he added, tautologically, ‘from any porridge I’ve been accustomed to.’

'You mean the thick, raw, half-boiled stuff which is thought to be the true Scotch dish?'

'But is it not?' said Mortimer.

'Well, I hardly know. I'm sorry if it is, for I can't take it. This is boiled for fully half-an-hour with, as you see, lots of water. Isn't it, cook?'

'Yes, sir,' answered a magnificent female, immediately below the salt.

This concluded the conversation for the time. Mortimer's spoon was as busy as those of the others, and every cog stood empty almost at the same instant. The wooden dishes were then removed, and drinking horns with silver rims set in their places. A pretty maid-servant took from an aumry a large stone jug and a formidable glass. Having curtsied to the Provost, who promptly rose and kissed her, she filled the glass and poured it into her master's horn. She seemed in doubt what to do next, but Jamieson nodded towards Mortimer, and she advanced and curtsied to him. He thrust his chair from the table, placed his hands on his knees with



the backs of them downwards, squaring his elbows, and stared the girl out of countenance.

‘Everything here,’ said the Provost, who was not quite well pleased, ‘is as innocent and wholesome as the porridge.’

‘I know, I know!’ cried Mortimer. ‘I’m only admiring.’

He rose with awkward ceremony. His face had resolved into such a ludicrous expression of beatification that the girl blushed and smothered a laugh as he kissed her. Then she filled a glass into his horn, and set the jug at the cook’s right hand. The cook took half a glass and passed the jug to the coachman, who dealt himself full measure, and so it went round the servants, the maids and a boy in buttons taking a half, and the men a whole glass. The Provost drank first, and after him all the servants. Mortimer thought by the bouquet and the dark colour that the beverage was whisky which had been kept in sherry-wood. He liked whisky well enough, but he had always regarded the drinking of neat spirits as a habit vulgar and

depraved ; and, forgetting his late resolution, was about to attack the custom in his most dogmatic and diffuse manner, when Jamieson said, 'Drink it, man. It's a hundred years old.'

'Might I not have a little water?' suggested Mortimer.

'A single drop of water spoils it. Doesn't it, cook?' said the Provost.

'It does indeed, sir,' answered the cook, deferentially, but with undeniable enthusiasm.

Seeing no help for it, Mortimer put the horn to his mouth and drank it off. The effect was instantaneous.

'By Jove!' he cried, 'that's very fine. As you say, a single drop of water would altogether disorganise this whisky. I perceive five flavours in it. First of all, there is the flavour of maturity ; secondly, there still remains a perceptible, a barely perceptible breath of the peat-reek ; thirdly, there is a subdued dash of the wood in which it has been kept ; fourthly, a distinct aroma of the sherry which preceded it in the wood ; fifthly, and lastly, and probably principally, I carried to the horn the sweet freshness of your maid-

servant's rosy cheek. Sir, this whisky has a creamy consistence, a mellowness as of ripe fruit—and yet there is a grasp in it, an appeal, a penetrating virtuosity, a pervasive subtlety, that defies further definition.'

'You've made mistakes,' said Jamieson. 'There's no flavour of sherry, but there's something else.'

'Let me see,' said Mortimer. 'Ah! I think I know. Stolen sweets?'

'Right,' replied Jamieson. 'It has the air of the Ochils about it, and never paid duty.'

'I was certain there was something escaping me,' said Mortimer. 'I felt it while I was defining. Doubtless the full definition would have occurred to me without your suggestion after another glass of the whisky.'

'Doubtless,' said the Provost, rising.

Mortimer and the servants immediately followed his example. The latter left the room one by one in order of precedence, the maids first, beginning with the cook, and they all bowed or curtsied at the door as they withdrew.

'Mary,' said the Provost, addressing the

maid who had served the whisky, 'take the jug and two horns to the study.'

'Sir,' said Mortimer, when they had returned to the Provost's sanctum, 'half-an-hour ago you promised to tell me in this room what you think of me. Before you do so, I should like to hear the history of this liquor. For the moment it interests me more than my own personality.'

'Certainly; because I cannot tell you the one without the other.'

'That is very remarkable,' said Mortimer. 'There can be no doubt that you are eccentric. Elements of greatness there may be, but eccentric you are in the highest degree. Could you give me a short sketch of your life? I am no idle gossip, but deeply in earnest. I search for the theory that underlies the phenomena of existence.'

'In order to give you the history of this whisky, in order to give you my opinion of yourself, it is necessary that you should have a short account of my life.'

'I thank heaven that I have met you, sir,' said Mortimer. 'You are like a skeleton-

clock: theory is visible through every transparent circumstance of your life, and every circumstance of your life seems to be transparent.'

'You shall judge,' said Jamieson. 'My father kept a shop in Mintern. He was a grocer.'

'Ha! you are a grocer's son, then!' cried Mortimer.

'Quite so; a licensed grocer's son. He had a respectable business, and lived comfortably. I was his only child, and got so much of my own way that by the age of ten I governed my parents absolutely. I had two passions common to boys—novel-reading and exploring. Look here!'

The Provost showed Mortimer a room opening off the study. Mortimer entered it, and found the walls shelved from floor to ceiling, and each shelf packed with books. When they resumed their seats, Jamieson sat musing for a minute or two, and Mortimer looked about the room, observing it more carefully than he had yet done. Deer skins almost covered the floor; an oaken writing-

table occupied the window recess ; the ceiling was of oak ; old oak chairs, and new ones in imitation of the old, stood against the walls, which were covered with long-bows, cross-bows, halberts, Andrea Ferraras, claymores, targets, horse-pistols, and some old pictures. Two suits of armour stood in corners. There were only a few books ; these were bound in calf, and stood on two carved oak shelves beside the carved oak mantelpiece. They were all Scotch, and included *The Tales of a Grandfather*, Drummond's *Five Jameses*, and Bellenden's Translation of Boece.

'There are two thousand novels in that room,' said Jamieson, rousing himself from his brown study, and interrupting Mortimer's inventory, 'all of which I had read before I was eighteen. At that age I stopped novels, and haven't opened one since. So much for one passion. The other continues unabated ; and I have been all over Europe, not in trains, but on my feet, or on horseback. At the age of ten, of course, my explorations were confined to the neighbourhood of Mintern. Within a radius of twenty miles I knew

every village, every ruin, every glen, every loch, and had climbed all the highest hills. From Benchonzie to Dunmyatt, from Moredun Top to Ben Ledi I rambled at will. In the summer I was often away from home for days together, sometimes sleeping in a haystack; but as a rule I had money to pay for a bed. At the outset of my travels I preferred the Ochils to the Grampians, and delighted especially to climb Dunmyatt. One morning shortly after I had turned my twelfth year—'

'I beg you to observe, Mr Jamieson,' said Mortimer, who thought he noticed a gradual assumption of distinction in the style of the narrative, and in the attitude of the narrator, 'that all this points only to eccentricity; not by any means to greatness.'

'Be that as it may,' said Jamieson, with his bland smile, 'on this particular morning a great desire to get to the top of Dunmyatt overtook me on my way to school. I threw my books over a wall and set off. Had I gone home I could easily have persuaded my parents to let me have a holiday, but, how-

ever certain of victory, I always hated argument, and avoided it in those days, and for years after, no matter at what cost to others. The distance from Mintern to the western end of the Ochils is twelve miles, so that it was one o'clock before I arrived at a farm at the foot of Dunmyatt, where I was known. I got dinner there, and in an hour after, the ascent being very easy, I was on the top of the hill. I had, of course, a novel with me—I never went anywhere at that time, school, bed, or church, without one—and read it through before I thought of descending. I went down the south side of the hill, intending to go to Blairlogie, a small village at the foot of Dunmyatt. I knew an old woman there with whom I meant to take tea. On the way I turned aside to have another look at an old copper-mine, which I had examined repeatedly, always in the hope of finding an entrance and a hidden treasure. This time I determined to make a thorough search. I attacked with vigour a considerable excavation—one of several dug by myself on former visits—making use of a rusty shovel left there



doubtless by some previous explorer. I worked at such a rate that in five minutes I was out of breath, and had to rest. Leaning on the shovel I looked up the hillside, and saw the entrance to a small cave which I had often examined, but had never thought of connecting with the mine. That idea occurred to me forcibly there and then, and I went up, shovel in hand. When I had dug about a foot into the floor of the cave I struck wood. Excitement increased my strength, and in a little while I had uncovered a lid about four feet square. One side of it rested on what proved to be a wooden slide into the mine; the other three sides rested on the rock. On lifting off the lid, my heart gave a great bound. I saw a round hole three feet in diameter, and the top of an inclined plane—the way I had no doubt to fabulous adventures. With scarcely a moment's hesitation I stepped in, and lying face downwards on the slide, which was two and a half feet broad, I clutched the sides of it and began to descend. I found the slope so gentle, however, that progress in that way was not only

laborious but unnecessary. I therefore got to my feet, and going back to the entrance took my shovel. Pressing it in my right hand against the side of the plane to guide me, I walked boldly down, counting my steps after the approved fashion in such adventures: thirty of my steps ended the descent. My eyes had already accustomed themselves to the semi-darkness, and I beheld an array of little barrels which I at once concluded would be full of jewels and ancient, or at least, foreign, gold and silver coins, with a little bullion. I searched about hoping to find an old hammer, or something with which to break open one of the barrels, but as the mine had not been worked for a great many years there were few traces of its origin, and nothing at all in the shape of a hammer. I was forced to use the shovel, my knife, and at last my foot. The shovel broke, the blade of my knife snapped off, and in despair I brought my heel down on the bung of the barrel I had attacked. Once, twice, and the third time it gave way, and I was splashed with whisky! I cried with dis-

gust and vexation. All the barrels were of the same pattern, and I judged, correctly, of the same contents. My first adventure, which a few minutes before had promised to my imagination a whole Arabia of wonder, to end in a few whisky barrels! I rushed up the slide, striking my head rather severely against the rock as I approached the exit, and, without making any attempt to conceal what I had done, went down to Blairlogie. The old woman gave me tea, after which I lay down on the sofa in her parlour and slept till day-break. I ate some bread and left the house without wakening my hostess. Being now quite good-humoured about my adventure, I climbed to the cave, and going into the mine, counted the barrels : there were fifty of them. I then covered the entrance with care and walked over the hill to Mintern, where I arrived shortly before breakfast. My father wouldn't at first believe my story, but I was so positive that he went to Dunmyatt with me next day. On the road home, the truth of my discovery having been established, my father was very meditative. About

half-way he asked me if I had told anybody except himself. This I had not done; and I remember distinctly, having assured my father that he was my only confidant, with what curiosity I watched his face for the rest of the way. A melancholy smile played over it. Beginning in a slight frown, it stole into his eyes, expanded his nostrils, and went out in a twitching of his upper lip. He had the reputation of being eccentric—'

'What was his first name?'

The Provost started, for he had forgotten Mortimer's presence, and a smile like that he had described flitted across his face.

'William James,' he answered.

'William James Jamieson!' cried Mortimer. 'Eccentric! I should think so! William James, Jean Jacques, Jean Paul! You see, double Christian names of that kind always denote eccentricity.'

'Your theory seems to have some foundation,' said Jamieson, and was about to continue his narrative, but Mortimer had caught fire.

'Some foundation!' he cried. 'Its basis

is the law of heredity. No one except an eccentric person will give an eccentric name. Some foundation! Why, you find it everywhere! Ay, even in the Bible; although I believe most exceptions are to be found among Biblical names, especially in antediluvian times. Still, look at Methuselah! Do you think he wasn't eccentric? Do you think a man who lived for nine hundred and sixty-nine years wasn't eccentric? Do you think his father wasn't eccentric? Why, Enoch was one of the most eccentric men who ever lived, because he was one of the best, and he didn't die. Look at Adam! Do you think he wasn't eccentric? and Eve too? Man, they must have been eccentric. Do you know, I'm beginning to think that everybody and every name is eccentric. Because, don't you see, if the names which are eccentric at present were common, then the common names would be eccentric. That, however, would do away with greatness altogether.'

'No doubt,' said Jamieson, laughing.  
'But you must let me get on with my story.'

'What are you langhing at?' cried Mortimer. 'Do you think I'm a fool?'

'Have patience,' said Jamieson, 'I'm coming to that. But you will require to hear the whole history of my life before you will be in a position to know what I think of you. My father had formed a plan on the way home from Dunmyatt. He took a house at once in Blairlogie, and we went there for the summer. He drove to Minter every morning, carrying with him sometimes one, sometimes two of the barrels; and in less than two months he had transferred them all, not to his shop, but to this house, which he had recently bought, and which was then only a third of its present size. He sent samples of the whisky to analysts and doctors, and the gentry in the neighbourhood; got it noticed in the *Lancet*, and advertised it widely. It soon had a great sale, and he made lots of money. I was twelve when I found the barrels, and my father died when I was twenty-six. During these fourteen years the 'Dunmyatt Whisky' was sold by the hogshead every

day. Once or twice I wondered how my father kept up the supply, but it didn't concern me much, and I never asked him. He invested his money as he made it, and he was always lucky. My mother and he died within a few weeks of each other, and I was left with £150,000. On his death-bed my father said very little, and passed away with a smile exactly like that which had interested me fourteen years before on the way home from Dunmyatt; a scarcely perceptible contraction of the brows; a faint gleam in the eye, half comic, half pathetic; and a slight curl of the lip which death undid the moment it appeared.'

Here Jamieson paused, staring at the toes of his boots, and Mortimer felt constrained to cough and to replenish his glass.

'Mr Jamieson,' said Mortimer, wiping his mouth and flecking his eyes with his handkerchief, 'let me congratulate you on this distinct exhibition of greatness. It may be in a small matter—most people have to lose their fathers—but an inferior man would

have flaunted his sorrow with a 'He was a good father to me; I wish I had been a better son," or something of that kind, fishing for the approbation of his auditor. Now, you—'

'Be quiet!' cried Jamieson, flashing out in a tone and a look which astonished Mortimer. 'Keep your dilettantism for suitable subjects.'

Mortimer gulped his whisky in alarm; but Jamieson had resumed the contemplation of his boots. Two minutes of great uneasiness followed this outburst, and then the Provost looked up with his bland smile. He said nothing, however, and Mortimer broke the silence.

'Did you ever find,' he asked, 'how your father kept the whisky going?'

'I shall tell you what I found,' said Jamieson. 'I found a key in my father's desk with this written on the label:—

“In a cellar numbered two  
You'll find the source of all my wealth.  
I am dead, but, Ninian, you  
Still may drink my soul's good health.”



In the cellar I found forty barrels of the "Dunmyatt Whisky" unbroached.'

'Where had he got them?'

'They were the original barrels intact. He had used ten of them in preparing samples, and kept the other forty. What he sold was a judicious blend of quite modern distillation.'

'How very like William James Jamieson!' exclaimed Mortimer.

'Once a week we have a porridge lunch with a taste of the whisky. We never drink it on any other occasion except on my father's birthday, as I wish to make it last as long as possible.'

'Mr Jamieson, have you ever reposed this confidence in another?'

'No, you are the first man I've told.'

'Then,' said Mr Mortimer, complacently, 'I can in some measure gather what your opinion of me is.'

But the Provost only smiled like his father.

'And I may also conclude something from the fact that you have departed in

my favour from your custom as regards the "Dunmyatt Whisky,"" said Mortimer, helping himself again.

This remark also elicited only a smile.

'Do you know anything of the history of this whisky prior to your finding it?' asked Mortimer.

'Nothing whatever,' said Jamieson. 'My father, I believe, made indirect inquiries, but without result. You can understand how he couldn't investigate the matter thoroughly.'

'Quite,' said Mortimer. 'But have you done nothing?'

'Nothing ; it doesn't interest me in the least.'

'By-the-bye, what led you to become Provost of Mintern?'

'That's very simple. Some months after the death of my father, the provostship falling vacant, I was asked to join the council in order to be elected to that office. The good people were so dazzled with the fortune my father had left that they would, I believe, have made me absolute monarch of the world had it rested with them.'

‘And what made you stop reading novels?’ asked Mortimer.

‘That’s just the point where I intend to resume my story,’ said Jamieson. ‘I gave up novels because I had begun to read history — Scotch history. It was Scott’s *Tales of a Grandfather* that started me; but I soon had a very particular reason for continuing the study. You must know that when the Chevalier de St George, otherwise James III. of England and VIII. of Scotland, was in this country in 1715, he married privately Marjory Morton, the daughter of the Laird of Tullibolton. Shortly after James left this country his wife died in giving birth to a son. Sheriffmuir had destroyed the Jacobite hopes of Morton of Tullibolton, and he became a staunch supporter of the Guelf dynasty. He called his grandson James Jamieson, and gave him to a farmer to rear. When the boy grew up he received a farm on the estate of Tullibolton, and was generally considered an illegitimate son of the laird’s. He didn’t care for farming, however, and joined a foot

regiment; and it is said that he fought against his step-brother, Prince Charles Edward, at Culloden.'

'Sir,' said Mortimer, 'I have read a little Scotch history, but I don't remember a word of all this.'

'There is no printed record of it,' said Jamieson, 'but I have documents to prove its truth, and you shall see them. Let me finish the story first. James Jamieson returned to Tullibolton in his fortieth year, and married a ploughman's daughter. Morton had been dead for some time, but he had left Jamieson a farm, which he had bought for that purpose, his estate being entailed. In the beginning of this century James Jamieson's great-great grandson, my great grandfather, sold the farm and removed to Mintern, where he began the business which my father inherited. Perhaps, since you have some acquaintance with Scotch history, you may remember that the so-called direct line of the Stuart race terminated in the Cardinal Frascati, who called himself Henry IX. By his death in 1807

the true direct line was left without a rival ; and as I am the sole representative of that branch, I am legitimately, and by divine right, Ninian I., King of Great Britain, France and Ireland.'

Mortimer sat up in his chair and stared at the Provost. He was now convinced of his insanity ; and Jamieson's serenity, after making such an astounding announcement, was, in Mortimer's mind, confirmation enough of the fact, had it needed any.

'You will now understand,' continued the Provost, assuming unconsciously a lordlier tone, 'the nature of my interest in Scotch history. It was an exceedingly opportune event in my life, the discovery at the age of eighteen of my rank and title ; for, as the result of my novel reading, I was the prey of a morbid ambition. I burned with a desire to distinguish myself in some heroic but unheard-of way. What appeared to me the utter paltriness of all possible careers, combined with my failure to conceive of one hitherto impossible, but which would open a path to my genius, drove me mad for

a short time. My father had with reluctance determined to remove me to an asylum, when I suddenly regained my sanity. It was the accidental discovery of the facts which I have briefly narrated to you that brought back my scattered senses.'

'How did you make the discovery?' asked Mortimer.

'I do not intend to enter on that just now,' said Jamieson. 'On some future occasion I may perhaps satisfy your curiosity. That the facts are true you need have no doubt: I give you my word. Some time I will show you the documents. For more than a year the mere knowledge of who I was satisfied my ambition, and the study of the lives of my ancestors occupied my time. Then I gave myself up to dreams of sovereignty, leaping over entirely the period of struggle. The mental strain of this continuous dream—for it was with me day and night—produced a time of extreme lassitude, during which I made my first tour on the continent. After my return the dream was in abeyance for more than a year, but it

seized me again with a shock like the recollection of an unfulfilled duty ; such, indeed, it had become to me. I shirked it, however, and went back to the continent, where I managed to smother my aspirations—my true self—for a time ; but only for a time. I remember it was in Bucharest that my destiny again laid hold of me. I had been gambling a little. Tired of the sordid excitement, I went up to the top of the house. The sun was sinking in the plain, and its last rays shed a lustre over the many-coloured roofs of the broad city, embowered in its gardens. The towers and domes of its hundred churches glowed and flashed like inlaid blades and shields. The narrow tortuous streets wound like serpents, bright with the hues of the robes and rags of the crowds that filled them. It was fair-time at Giurgevo, the port of Bucharest, and hundreds of people from every nation in Asia mingled with the inhabitants. Whether it was the spires and domes that recalled to me our targets and claymores, or the rainbow-coloured crowds that reminded me of the

tartans, I was not sufficiently self-conscious at the time to observe, but there leapt out on the sky a vision of the battle of Culloden. The shrieks, shouts, laughter, and outlandish music ascending from the streets mingled with the vision. I watched it long, and it vanished only when I began unwittingly to recite Aytoun's ballad—

“Chief and vassal, lord and yeoman, there they lie in  
heaps together,  
Smitten by the deadly volley, rolled in blood upon the  
heather ;  
And the Hanoverian horsemen, fiercely riding to and  
fro,  
Deal their murderous strokes at random. . . . Woe  
is me ! where am I now ?”

‘ I had no sleep that night, and next morning I started for Scotland. All the way home scheme after scheme chased each other through my head. At one time I determined to enter Parliament and proceed in a constitutional manner. It seemed to me a very simple thing to form a party, principally in the House of Lords, and to mature it for my reign. “The lords,” I said



to myself, "are not nearly alive to the splendid position in which they now are. One or two of them seem to have grasped it, but they wish to keep it to themselves in order that they may lead. Nothing can ever be done in that way. The whole body of the aristocracy must lead the nation ; they must not allow themselves tamely to be swamped by capital. Their reply to those who want to tamper with the land must be a demand for the redistribution of capital. Let them go to the people with that, and there will be no more tinkering at the Upper Chamber for a hundred years to come." You see, I thoroughly understood the true method of constitutional government : to pit class against class in the bitterest feud. It's as old as Caius Gracchus, and older. Well, having organised a strong party among the lords, I should have waited until I became prime minister ; then, heading a revolution prepared by myself, I should have seized the crown. Another plan was to enter the army and, having obtained a position of power, to rebel, but this did not seem so certain a way

as the other. Sometimes I thought to further my design chiefly through the press, by starting a Jacobite newspaper or magazine. There was besides a very simple plan which commended itself to me for a brief space: to state to Britain in a modest address who I was, and that I had abandoned the legend of my family and was quite prepared to govern exactly as the nation required. By the time I got home my excitement had produced brain-fever. And when I recovered, although thoroughly conscious of who I was, a whole year of contentment followed. Then I began to read Carlyle, and I have had no rest since the day I opened *Heroes and Hero-worship*. I feel in myself the power to govern Britain as it has never been governed. I have the strength, if I can wrench from fate the opportunity, to weld together the English-speaking nations; to make New York the capital of a Britain greater than Dilke's; to shake the Russian empire to pieces, like an ill-made garment, the work of sweaters; to plant the cross in Constanti-

nople; to people Africa; to open China; to dictate to the world. I fought with myself; I tried to learn Greek; I tried to paint; I read biographies in the hope of being attracted by some other career than that of a claimant to the throne of Britain. The life of Benvenuto Cellini charmed me, and I began to work in metals. Here is the sole result.'

Jamieson opened a drawer in his writing-table and handed Mortimer a small leather case. Mortimer took from it a roughly-made medal, on the face of which was a likeness of the Provost, with the words—'NINIANUS PRIMUS, BRITANIAE REX, F. D.'; and on the reverse, the royal arms with 'GRATIA DEI, SED NON VOLUNTATE HOMINUM.'

Said Mortimer, who had recovered from his astonishment, and was in his most critical mood, 'Did you make this while your father was alive?'

'Yes,' said Jamieson,

'Then you were only Prince of Wales at that time.'

'True,' said Jamieson; 'but I tested my

father often in many indirect ways, and found that he knew nothing of his rank. Of course, had I achieved my object in his lifetime, I would have made him king. Well, when I was elected Provost the old idea of entering Parliament returned, so I set about making myself popular, an object I attained. I have also managed to keep the people at a distance, chiefly by never appearing in the streets except in my carriage.'

'Admirable!' burst out Mortimer. 'I see theory there. But go on.'

'The news of the making of diamonds in Glasgow modified my plans. Fifty diamonds worth £100,000 each would be £5,000,000. With such a capital one might become anything. I fitted up a laboratory, and after working for two years, succeeded yesterday in producing two diamonds.'

Jamieson took from his vest-pocket a pill-box, and handed it to Mortimer.

'In my excitement,' continued the Provost, 'I told the correspondent of the *Scotsman*, and he communicated the news to his paper. But at night I submitted one of the diamonds

to a greater pressure than I had at first employed, and it was crushed to a paste ; you see it there in the box. The other one looks all right, but it is soft at the core. You can imagine how chagrined I was. The last train had left hours before I made the hideous discovery. I hired a cab and four horses and drove to Edinburgh, but I was too late to prevent the appearance of my over-hasty communication.'

'Why didn't you telegraph?'

'I couldn't ; it would have been known far and wide in Mintern next day. The reporter I bribed, but I couldn't bribe the postmaster, and he is one of my principal enemies in the town, and the telegram at that time of night could not have been despatched without his cognisance. On my road to the train this morning I resolved to beat no more about the bush, but to throw everything else aside and make a dash for the crown. I forgot my chagrin the moment my resolution was taken ; and the reception I had at the station showed me the necessity of leaving Mintern at once. I understand popularity

sufficiently to know that when the people learn that they have been, as they will say, "hoaxed" no explanation will satisfy them, and they will despise me because of their own absurd conduct of to-day. My chance of the membership is gone; besides, I tell you frankly, I couldn't stand the nods and winks and grins that would meet me everywhere.'

'But why not go on with your diamonds, and make them as hard-hearted as they need to be?'

'I don't think it's possible; and I couldn't repeat the process, for it was as much chance as good guiding that produced these miserable spongy sparks. And then I'm tired of waiting and dreaming. I must act.'

The Provost rose, and marched up and down the room with long strides, erect head, and flaming eyes.

'And now,' said Mortimer, 'what has all this got to do with your opinion of me?'

'Ah!' replied the Provost, resuming his seat, 'I had forgotten that. When you came into the train with your funny little fat body,

and short squint legs, and your staring red hair, and round goggle eyes, looking as important as all the Mintern town councillors rolled into one, something whispered to me that we would be better acquainted; and when you began to talk I saw at once how it was to be. You must know that when I am king I intend to revive many of the customs of the feudal monarchs; and it occurred to me to start at once by appointing you my court-jester, my fool. Yes,' continued the Provost, unabashed by the pallor of Mortimer's face and the ruddy glare of his eyes, 'all your speech and action, and the droll reason for changing your name, mark you out as well fitted for a professional fool. You little dreamt, I expect, when you were cultivating your ridiculous gestures, and developing your grotesque style of speech—and it must have cost you some trouble—that you were obeying that transcendant law which is called Chance. You with your ardent desire to amuse your fellow-men, unappreciated hitherto, meet me who have a kingly desire to be amused in my moments of leisure by just that

titillation of the intellect which it is the aim of your life to produce. You at once begin your fooling in your best form without any introduction, and I at once appreciate you at your full value. Chance may be the only term for such meetings as ours, but let us understand by Chance an occult phase of Destiny. I may tell you that I admire you very much indeed.'

Mortimer was on his legs. His very hair had turned pale; his eyes were bloodshot, and a slight foam oozed from his lips. He struck an heroic attitude, his right foot advanced and his left hand clenched at his side. With the forefinger of his right hand rigidly extended, he made violent stabs at the Provost.

'I have an annuity,' he cried, 'an annuity of £400. I am a man of education—of culture. I have not read two thousand novels, nor addled my brains with Scotch history; but I have all the common sense I was born with. I'm not six feet, and straight, and black-eyed, but I have a sanguine complexion, and I can tell you it



is a complexion much more capable of greatness than your passionate bilious hue that burns to ashes in license and madness. I play the fool! I have brains, sir, more brains than body. You have body, sir, more body than brains; and I am king and you are fool by all the laws—by all the laws! It was exactly men of your calibre that sank to court-jesters long ago—men with more body and blood than brains and sense. Your imagination has broken the halter; you can't be shod, sir, you are incapable of any serious undertaking, of any abstruse thinking. I play a part! I be anything else than myself! I tell you I have an annuity of £400, and a house in Edinburgh; and I am forty and a bachelor. And I do what I like, and I say what I like, and I go where I like; and I am going now, sir. I want to hear no more of your brain-sick humbug—your porridge and your watered whisky, and your kings, and your ninnies, and your *Ninianus*. Ha, ha, ha! *Ninianus primus*—the prize ninny! Ha, ha, ha!

'That's only passable, Cosmo,' said the Provost, 'only passable. You have strained

yourself and overdone it; your assumed sincerity almost became real. But you must be tired, Cosmo; you have done some very good fooling—quite sufficient for one day. Don't make any effort. You have shown most indubitable ability as a clown, and you may rest on your oars, Cosmo. I'm going to call you Cosmo. It suits your profession admirably. Triboulet, Chicot, Scogan, Bonny—Cosmo; your name is quite fit to come at the tail of these, and I believe you will make as good and loyal a fool as any of them. And so, Cosmo, I have let you know all about myself, because the great kings took their fools into their confidence, and I will ask your advice sometimes, as they did.'

Mortimer, who after his passionate speech had sunk down exhausted, sprang to his feet again more enraged than before.

'You misunderstand me wilfully,' he cried. 'You are a miserable *farceur*, and I despise you. I have written for newspapers, and I'll put you into a sketch with all your follies—by name, sir, by name; and you can summon

me for libel and welcome. I'll *libel* you! I'll make you worse than you are; I'll make you the laughing-stock of Scotland—by name sir, by name. And I shall leave your hideous inæsthetic house at once, sir, and shall expose *it* too, sir.'

'Cosmo, Cosmo, take care,' said Jamieson, as one would address a dog, intercepting Mortimer, who moved toward the door.

'I shall be bullied no longer,' screamed Mortimer. Boiling with anger and whisky, he snatched a claymore from the wall and brandished it with unscientific vigour. 'Make way there,' he cried, imitating to the best of his ability some position which he had seen on the stage.

Jamieson, with his back to the door, took down the immense weapon which had already helped Mortimer to make up his mind, and put himself, with almost as much awkwardness as his opponent, into an attitude of defence. The heavy broad sword was quite pliable in Jamieson's hands; but Mortimer, observing that he had no better idea of fenc-

ing than himself, thought he saw his advantage. He lowered his claymore, retired a few steps, and although he had difficulty in restraining himself, succeeded in addressing the Provost with the gravity of a champion about to engage in moral combat.

'I perceive,' he said, 'that you know nothing at all about *l'escrime*. Now, when I was in Paris, I went two or three times a week to the Bois de Boulogne, and was invariably victorious. I have a cut which is simply irresistible, thus,' and Mortimer placed himself in an agonising position, which he maintained with difficulty for the space of three seconds, and went through an involute series of curves and thrusts, as if he had been describing a lover's knot in the air. Recovering himself just in time to escape a fall he stuck the point of his sword in a deer-skin, and resting his left hand on his hip, examined the effect of his performance on the Provost. It was satisfactory, he thought; but he mistook what was merely vexation for anxiety. The Provost was cursing that restless indolence of his which had led him to

dream so much and wander so far, but had left him wholly unacquainted with a necessary kingly accomplishment. Mortimer imagined he was thinking out some dignified method of withdrawing from the quarrel.

‘So,’ resumed the professed duellist, ‘you had better not insist on what can only end in bloodshed. Let me go quietly, and—’

‘Come, Cosmo,’ the Provost interrupted, understanding that Mortimer lied, ‘let us try this deadly cut.’

With that he advanced from the door, holding the pommel of his broadsword against his breast, the blade projecting six feet in front of him. Mortimer made repeated slashes at it, but failed to do more than sway it a little as Jamieson grasped the hilt with both hands; and when Mortimer tried a flank movement, the Provost wheeled his point into position. Soon the little man was pinned against the wall.

‘Now or never is the time for the cut,’ said Jamieson, pressing the point in a button-hole of Mortimer’s vest.

'Don't,' said Mortimer pathetically, dropping his sword.

The Provost immediately released him, and Mortimer hung the claymore on the wall and went back to his chair.

'I'm a coward,' he groaned. 'I'm not a great man. I'm only Hugh Smith. Cosmo Mortimer would have died against that wall.'

The Provost hung up his weapon also, and was about to resume his seat when a gong sounded.

'Half-past five,' he said. 'We've had a long talk. Dinner's at six. Come and dress.'

## CHAPTER III

### NOW OR NEVER

THE Provost's dressing-room was immediately above the study, and as large as it. A little room opened off it, corresponding to that which contained the novels below ; it was his bedroom. Two entire sides of the dressing-room were fitted up as a wardrobe, one with shelves three feet broad, and the other with pegs ; sliding panels of oak extended from floor to ceiling ; and as the other walls were wainscotted in oak, the existence of the wardrobe could not easily be detected. In the centre of this apartment mirrors were arranged as in a tailor's fitting-on room. The rest of the furnishings were not distinguished by any peculiarity.

‘Now,’ said the Provost, ‘I have a great many costumes here. There are the princely fashions of half-a-dozen centuries for myself, and a variety of garbs in which I sometimes dress my servants; among them is the very thing for you.’

The Provost moved a panel and took from the wardrobe a cap with ass’s ears and a cock’s comb, having a bell on each ear and on the comb; a coat, the skirt of which was cut into peaks, with immense peaks at the elbows; and a pair of tights. One half of each of these garments was red, the other yellow. He also brought out a pair of long-toed shoes, of which the one was blue and the other green.

‘I got these,’ he said, ‘last Christmas for my coachman, who is a bit of a wag. You can wear them in the meantime.’

Mortimer gasped and trembled; he placed his hands on the toilet-table to steady himself, and tried to speak, but passion choked him.

‘Don’t you like the dress?’ asked Jamieson.



‘No,’ began Mortimer, but he could get no farther.

‘Give it a trial,’ said Jamieson, turning to the wardrobe to select a dress for himself.

‘Come,’ he said, having made his choice and finding Mortimer’s position unchanged, ‘don’t be sulky.’

With perfect good-humour he took a riding-whip from a peg, and switching the air looked at himself in one of the mirrors, and remarked to his reflection, ‘If I couldn’t control my passions, I wouldn’t like to be your fool, my liege, since you claim the ancient right of chastisement. No, my liege, I shouldn’t like to come under your whip, for I’ll be bound you could lay it on with any beadle or drum-major of them all.’

Mortimer tried to swallow his passion at one gulp, but it stuck in his throat for hours after. Shuddering, he divested himself of his pepper-and-salt, and pulled on the red-and-yellow. As the coachman for whom the dress had been made was almost as tall as his

master, Mortimer had considerable difficulty in disposing of the superfluous cloth. The waist of the coat girded his thighs, the scalloped skirt came below his knees, and half a foot of the sleeve had to be rolled back, while the peak of it depended from his wrist. As for the tights, they had also to be rolled up, and they were so wide for him that his legs looked as if some malicious malady had destroyed the flesh, leaving the shrivelled skin flapping about the bones. The cap and bells fitted him well, his head being disproportionately big, but the shoes stuck out behind as well as in front, looking like a pair of rockers. He bore a strong resemblance to a Brahmapootra cock. A careful observation of the Brahmapootra cock might lead one who knew no better to surmise that he is simply a good-sized Spanish fowl, plucked alive by boys, coated with mud, and re-feathered in a hurry; his dress seems about to forsake him, and he shuffles along with his plumes coming down among his toes in evident dread of finding himself suddenly a two-legged animal without feathers. Some such

idea as this crossed the Provost's mind as he contemplated Mortimer—a gigantic toy Brahmapootra cock mounted on rockers. Laughing, he pushed the little man among the mirrors, and Mortimer beheld himself from all points of view, and sank on the floor aghast and ashamed. His misery was complete when he turned his eyes on Jamieson, for he had appalled himself magnificently in the fashion of the early part of Henry VIII.'s reign. He wore a plaited shirt embroidered with gold, and a small ruff; a coat of violet-coloured velvet, damasked with gold, the sleeves and breast slashed and puffed with cloth of gold and ornamented with rubies; his hose, which were of white knitted silk, extended, in accordance with the fashion he had adopted, from his waist to his feet; and he was shod with velvet buskins of the same colour as his coat, slashed and puffed with gold.

'No!' cried Mortimer, rising to his feet with tears in his eyes. 'What have I done, what have I said to merit this?'

His eloquence forsook him, and the Provost

marched him down to the hall, saying, as the big shoes clattered on the steps, 'Good cousin Cosmo, you will come to like these garments in time. It is what everyone wants, and is glad of ultimately, however much he may rebel at first—to be shaken into a uniform; you are thrice lucky in getting the livery which is required to complete your character.'

Mortimer was unable to reply.

At dinner Jamieson was restless and silent; he ate little and took no wine. He paid no attention to Mortimer who, having recovered the use of his tongue, kept up a constant muttering from the soup to the salad, much to the amusement of the servants. His smothered ejaculations were almost inaudible at the start. Words and phrases, such as 'annuitant — culture — literary ability — wretched provosts—incapable of greatness,' accompanied by fierce glances to right and left, were distinguishable between the spoonfuls of soup; but it was not until several glasses of sherry and Jamieson's want of attention had roused his courage that

Mortimer's soliloquy got fairly under weigh. Even then, although emphatic enough, it was still suppressed; this added to its intensity, but it did not become fluent till the end of the dinner. A speech punctuated with potatoes and pigeon-pie and roast meat, with dashes of sherry and champagne, with periods of mastication and parentheses of silence, may be brilliant, but it cannot be smooth.

'I'm not a hero—no!' he said, with a withering glance at the cook. 'I don't think an annuitant could be a hero.' Here he drank some champagne and, taking a sight across the rim of his glass, plunged his eyes into the coachman. 'But it doesn't follow that a great man must be a hero. Hamlet,' he specially informed the astonished boy in buttons, 'was a great man, but he wasn't a hero. The difference between great men and heroes is that great men are wise and heroes are fools. Nelson was a hero; Wellington was a great man. Heroes,' he pointedly assured the maid who had served the whisky at lunch, 'are eccentric; heroism

is eccentricity. That,' he explained to the gardener, 'is an epigram.' He then devoted fully two minutes of concentrated attention to a succulent slice of the undercut. 'Greatness is humble, it is submissive ; heroism is aggressive and arrogant.' Here he stole a glance at Jamieson, and finding that he wasn't observed, turned on the full blaze of his eyes and hissed out, 'Provosts have frequently been heroes ; annuitants never !'

Thus he continued, gathering momentum until, with a stalk of celery in one hand and a knife with a piece of cheese on the point of it in the other, he stood up and burst into a storm of eloquence and self-contradiction.

'To be kidnapped in this way,' he cried, extending the knife with the button of cheese like a miniature foil, and rapping the table with the stalk of celery, 'and that by a miserable Provost, whose sole excuse is that he is affected with softening of the brain, is unendurable, except by a great man. I have endured it. I have suffered myself to be clad in this antique misfit without a murmur. I have sat here the object of the

scorn and laughter of menials. I have drunk the wine and eaten the meat of my persecutor with patience—and even with considerable enjoyment. I have made some remarks to which he has paid no attention; but I trust he is listening now.'

An animated gesture at this point sent the button of cheese flying down the table. In the heat of the moment the speaker made a lunge after it with his knife, but, of course, failed to capture it. Then, with that sort of reflex action which is the cause of many ludicrous doings on the part of orators, he stabbed his celery-stalk, and holding it out transfixed on the point of his knife, continued his deliverance.

'I say,' he shouted, 'that a hero, pure and simple, is never a great man, but a great man may be a hero. Heroism is thoughtless, and it is allowable for a great man sometimes to be thoughtless, but he must take care that his thoughtlessness is not mere thoughtless thoughtlessness, as, indeed, it cannot be, for great men are never thoughtless. I have submitted to

the indignities which I have specified; I have borne them with meekness—I have even turned the other cheek; but I now wish to enter a protest against the inhumanity of the treatment which I have received; and the easiest and most heroic method open to me in present circumstances is to pluck off this cap of ignominy, which like a red-hot crown has seared my temples and kept up a jingling which has nearly driven me mad, and flinging it on the ground, as you now see, to trample it under foot like an accursed thing, crushing the miserable bells of it flat on the floor, as you now hear.'

Having stamped on the cap and bells with both feet, Mortimer folded his arms and sat down in a great and heroic attitude.

The Provost smiled faintly and clapped his hands gently. 'Bravo!' he cried; but he was so preoccupied that he had not understood a word of what Mortimer had said. He was about to resume his meditation when it struck him that he had better compliment his fool.



‘Cosmo,’ he said, ‘if I only make as good a king as you do a clown we shall be celebrated. It is natural,’ he added, after a moment’s thought, ‘that the revival of the Stuart dynasty should be accompanied by the revival of the court-jester; and if I have the temerity to think that I am destined to be the agent of one of these revivals, it is a small matter to believe that in you I have become acquainted with the reviver of the other.’

Mortimer gnashed his teeth. ‘Will you not understand?’ he cried. ‘However grotesque and absurd my words and ways may be in your eyes, I am thoroughly earnest in all I do and say. To try to make a fool of me as you are doing is ignoble and unworthy of a king.’

This appeal passed unheeded, for Jamieson’s thoughts were far away. He rose, and the servants left the hall ceremoniously. Then he poured out a glass of wine for himself—the first he had taken—drank a little of it, pressed his forehead with both hands, and leant towards Mortimer.

‘Cosmo,’ he said, ‘we must act. Some-one has said that if a man has done nothing remarkable before he is thirty he will be a nonentity all his life. I am twenty-eight; I have done nothing yet but dream and devise deeds. In two years—in one—in a month—a man might forestall the fatal thirty. We have two years, Cosmo; and to-night we will join issue with time. I have told you some of my schemes; I discard them all for the simplest and best, and the most adventurous. It occurred to me at dinner, and it is this: to start to-night on foot, we two, and take our chance. We know the object with which we go forth, but nothing more. What do you think of it? But that doesn’t matter; my mind is made up. I have not felt so light-hearted since I ceased reading novels.’

‘Saul,’ said Mortimer, incisively, ‘went out to seek his father’s asses and found a kingdom; when asses go out seeking a kingdom they may be thankful if they find thistles.’

‘The event is nothing to me now,’ said Jamieson. ‘My resolve to undertake the ex-

pedition, and the certainty that I shall go through with it to a final result—a gallows or a crown—is the cause of my happiness.’

Mortimer shed tears of helpless anger as he followed Jamieson to the study.

It was after ten when, with cloaks over their fancy dresses, they went forth through the fields by an unfrequented way. Mortimer had been allowed to put on his own cap and boots, but he had been compelled to buckle round his waist a sword of lath. Jamieson carried a rapier, and had a pistol stuck in his belt; he, also, wore a modern hat and boots. When they had passed out of sight of Mintern they left the fields, intending to take to the highway; but as there was still a possibility of meeting known persons, they walked in a wood which skirted the road.

‘Cosmo,’ said Ninian, ‘is this not better than fishing?’

Mortimer’s answer was not forthcoming at once. He had felt the soothing influence of the walk through the fields, and was inclined temporarily to accept the position as

the only means of getting out of it. It was with some hesitation, however, and a tremor in his voice, for it was difficult for the little man even to appear to yield, that he said, 'How means your majesty—as sport, pleasure, or duty?'

Ninian stood still a second and blushed with delight: it was the first time he had been addressed as a king.

'But which is it, Cosmo?' he asked. 'I should say it partakes of the nature of all three.'

'Your majesty is partly right,' said Mortimer, who was astonished to find himself enjoying the situation, 'and partly wrong. It partakes of the nature of all three for you; it partakes of the nature of none of them for me.'

'How is that, good Cosmo? I thought all lawful occupations came under one of these three heads. I admit you are the first, so far as I know, to make a distinction between sport and pleasure; but I believe such exists.'

'Exists, my liege! It is the only distinction which does exist,' cried Mortimer, whose skill in the invention of theories submission

had restored. 'In comparison with it all other distinctions are moonshine. Pleasure is used erroneously to denote all employments in which a man spends money without the hope of a monetary or concrete return of any kind: all basking and lounging and doing nothing from which a man derives satisfaction; every method of taking one's ease—all annihilation of time by any means which is not work. But this definition includes sport. Then why have we the word sport? You see, there are the two words—there must be two things. At first I thought pleasure was generic, and sport a species, but I now know better. Sport, my lord, is any serious undertaking from which a man derives neither pleasure nor profit, and which he does not intend or expect to be either pleasant or profitable. One example will do. I fish. Well, why do I fish? And, by the way, I believe I'm the first angler who ever asked himself that question. I fish because others fish. I fish because I got the present of a rod when I was a boy. I fish because I am an

annuitant and, having nothing to do, must kill time in some orthodox fashion. I hate angling; it tires my arm; I run the hooks into my fingers, and get wet, and frequently catch colds, and never catch fish. But it is my sport; I massacre my fingers, but I also massacre time, and I am respected because I am a sportsman. Oh, my liege, it takes great men to be sportsmen! Do you think the world would yield them such deference if self-denial and self-sacrifice were not at the bottom of all sport? I tell you the world cares for nothing but self-denial.'

'But I know fishers,' said Ninian, while Mortimer paused for breath, 'who take great pleasure in their sport.'

'A contradiction in terms, my lord. There's the theory: sport is a serious undertaking, neither pleasant nor profitable. You can't get over that. Where pleasure enters there is no sport. Those fishers who take pleasure in fishing have ceased to be sportsmen, because they have ceased to exercise self-denial. You see? There's nothing like theory.'

‘Then, good cousin, what is your theory of your share in the present undertaking?’

‘My lord, my share in the present undertaking is not pleasant, because I don’t like it; it is not duty, because it is not work, and there is no inner voice compelling me; it is not sport, because, although neither pleasant nor profitable, it is not voluntary. There is one other category under which it may come, and that is slavery. I am the captive of your wiles and the captive of your sword; you force me to do a thing against my will and without a wage; I am therefore your slave. Let us finish it, my liege. Shall I bow down that you may put your foot on my neck?’

‘No, Cosmo, no; you shall not be my slave, because, as long as you are my jester, I’ll give you a salary; I’ll double your income, Cosmo. As to your not liking it, I can’t help that. No man is fit to be a king who is not a consummate judge of men. I have given you the one *rôle* for which you are fitted, and you will thank me in time. You see, Cosmo, there’s the theory: a king

must be a consummate judge of men. Now, I am a king, therefore I have judged you rightly. There's nothing like theory, Cosmo.'

Mortimer was quite prepared to prove that it altogether depended on who enunciated the theory, but Ninian's intimation that he was to be paid so handsomely changed the aspect of affairs.

'Cousin,' he said, availing himself of the jester's privilege, and with a blandness equal to Ninian's, 'I shall accept your theory when you give me the same satisfaction as a king, which I seem to give you as a fool.'

'A fair bargain,' said Ninian. 'I own my task will be arduous. I have made a study of my ancestors, and I think I know what to avoid, but what models to follow is another matter.'

'But your majesty has already contradicted yourself, in my hearing, in this very matter of conduct.'

'Have I, Cosmo? It can be only a seeming contradiction.'

'As irreconcilable as yes and no.'

'Let us hear it.'



‘Your majesty, with a condescension worthy of your ancient race, stated your determination to govern according to modern constitutional ideas. How can you reconcile that with your intention to revive feudalism?’

‘I admit, Cosmo, that my ideas on this whole subject of government are nebulous; but whatever they may or shall be it is my intention to proceed constitutionally—that is, to educate the people to my way of thinking either by the pen or by the sword.’

With such talk they beguiled the way until the moon rose, and Ninian began to grow moody. They still kept in the wood, in which there was a beaten path parallel to the high road. The moon’s light fell here and there like splashes of silver on the trunks of the trees and the dark glossy leaves of the blaeberrys. Fitful gusts of wind travelled over the wood. They were to be heard whispering far off among the tree-tops; and as they came nearer the sound seemed hardly louder, but more distinct and intense, until they passed with a prolonged ‘hush!’ over

the heads of the travellers into the road; and there they fell silent. These night winds at first soothed Ninian, but their rapid recurrence began to trouble him, and without consulting Mortimer he left the wood. Mortimer followed him promptly, and they continued their journey in silence for some time.

At length Ninian, throwing off his cloak and hanging it over his arm—an action in which his companion imitated him—approached close to Cosmo, as if glad to feel the neighbourhood of another mortal, and addressed him less cavalierly than he had yet done.

‘Cousin,’ he said, ‘this road, which we took because it was the first we came to, leads to Tullibolton. Strange as it may seem to you, I have never visited Tullibolton House, nor made the acquaintance of the Mortons. I don’t know what has prevented my doing so—and, indeed, it seems strange to myself—but we shall go there to-night. It is destiny which has directed our steps.’

'How far are we from Tullibolton?' asked Mortimer.

'Half a mile.'

'Well, my liege, it's about half-past twelve just now. What kind of reception from the Mortons of Tullibolton do you imagine awaits two utter strangers at this time of night, and in our guise, too?'

'Cosmo,' said Ninian, 'we are here upon an adventure, and we must follow the indications that are given us. Worldly wisdom, of which your remark savours, is totally foreign to our undertaking, as to all great undertakings. Nothing valiant, nothing noble, nothing great, was ever done by men who counted the cost. In the small matter of our visit to Tullibolton we have nothing to do with the reception which awaits us. We feel constrained to go there, and we go.'

'What sound is that?' cried Mortimer.

'I hear nothing,' said Ninian.

'I thought I heard riders in front, but I must have been mistaken.'

'Mahomet's first converts were his re-

lations,' said Ninian, quickening his pace. 'I shall go to Tullibolton as a king; there must be no compromise now.'

He strode along at such a rate that Mortimer, having to trot in order to keep up with him, was about to protest, when they were brought to a standstill by a cry of 'Halt.' At the same moment a horse leapt from the shadow of some trees into the road, and its rider, presenting a revolver, demanded in a sweet voice their money or their lives.

Ninian instantly drew his pistol from his belt, cocked it, and had almost fired when he observed that the rider was a woman.

'Lady,' he said, still covering her with his pistol, 'if you need money I will give it you.'

He thought she might be in debt, as young ladies will sometimes be, and was now making a desperate attempt to get her account settled.

'Here's another!' gasped Mortimer, drawing his wooden sword and pressing close

to Ninian, as a second amazon appeared from the shadow.

‘You’ve lost, Marjory,’ she said.

‘Or won, aunt,’ said the first, putting away her revolver and bending down to see Ninian, whose violet velvet and white silk made him a notable figure in the moonlight. She scanned him from top to toe, and her eyes rested long on his. Then she sat up in a hurry with a deep blush covering her face and neck. She had been surprised into her scrutiny of Ninian; it was his steady devouring gaze that recalled her to herself.

‘I am the king,’ said Ninian. ‘Who are you?’

Marjory, amazed, made no answer; but her aunt, thinking that they dealt with masqueraders, replied for her.

‘This is Miss Marjory Morton of Tullibolton.’

‘Fair cousin,’ said Ninian, more pleased than surprised, ‘this is a happy meeting, for we are on our way to Tullibolton.’

‘Aunt, come here,’ said Marjory, turn-

ing her horse and riding forward a few yards.

‘What shall I say?’ she asked, when her aunt had joined her.

‘Nothing,’ was the answer. ‘Ride straight home now. They are evidently bad men from Edinburgh or Glasgow on a holiday—and inferior too, I’ve no doubt.’

‘I think I’ll bid them welcome,’ said Marjory, who had ridden off not so much to consult her aunt as to make up her mind; she was one of those to whom motion is necessary when a rapid decision is required. ‘Yes, I’ll invite them.’

‘You will do a very wrong thing, then,’ said her aunt.

‘Not at all. He who calls himself the king is a gentleman every way; I saw it in his eyes.’ She rode back, accompanied by her aunt, who vainly whispered dissuasive arguments.

‘Gentlemen,’ said Marjory, ‘you will be welcome to Tullibolton. I think we shall have explanations to make to each other. You know the way?’

'Quite well, fair cousin,' said Ninian.

'We shall ride on, then, to prepare for your coming.'

'A thousand thanks,' said Ninian.

'Well!' exclaimed Mortimer, as the ladies rode away.

'Well?' queried Ninian.

'Nothing,' said Mortimer, shaking his head from side to side, and up and down, and looking unutterable theories.

## CHAPTER IV

THOMSINA MERCER

WHEN Ninian and Cosmo entered the drawing-room of Tullibolton House its sole occupant was the elder of the two women. She sat where shaded lamps half hid her face, and showed to best advantage the remains of her beauty. She had a fan, which was excusable after her ride, and she played it with some grace, varying the light and shade of the lamps. She wore her riding-habit, and it became her well. Her face, even in the subdued light, looked fully thirty-five, but her figure seemed much younger. All this Cosmo took in at a glance, after she had bowed them to a seat, and his inner voice said, 'She's well preserved; over forty; face a little gone; body, good—always the way



with unmarried women. Theory again. Faces of matrons last longer than their figures; figures of single women last longer than their faces.'

'Gentlemen,' said the unconscious object of this criticism, 'I hardly know what to say, my niece is so wilful.'

'Madam,' began Mortimer.

'Peace, fool,' said Ninian.

Mortimer, always red-hot, turned to white heat, and ground his teeth. His post was to be no sinecure, that was evident.

It was well enough when they were alone, but he questioned if £400 a year was at all an equivalent for the indignity of being called 'fool' at Ninian's pleasure. He set himself to think the matter out.

'Madam,' continued Ninian, 'nothing in the whole course of my life has given me greater pleasure than this meeting.'

'I am sorry that it gives you so much pleasure, for my niece is acting very foolishly, I think. She will not be here for a minute or two yet, and if you are gentlemen you will leave the house before she comes.'

‘How, madam! Would you dictate to me?’ said Ninian, haughtily.

This rather disconcerted the lady, and she looked to Cosmo for help; but he was also unprepared for such rigorous absolutism.

‘If Miss Morton,’ said Ninian, more graciously, ‘requests our withdrawal we shall comply.’

Nothing was said to this, so Ninian leant back with his arms folded and stared at the ceiling. The lady opened and shut her fan, and tapped the floor with her foot, and Mortimer shifted about in his chair until Marjory entered the room.

Her riding-habit had been changed for a costume which she had worn a fortnight before at a ball in Perth: a close-bodied gown of brocaded cream-coloured silk with tight sleeves, and a gorget ruff enclosing her head like an open casket, or the cup of a flower; her head-dress was a copy of that commonly associated with Mary, Queen of Scots, although the rest of her costume was more than half a century later—after the stye of Henrietta

Maria. She was under the average height for women, and her figure was girlish ; she had just turned eighteen. Her dark brown hair, tinged with gold about the temples, hung in thick natural curls a little below her shoulders. The lustre of health glowed in her pale face. Her chin was broad, and her mouth large and well shaped ; the lips of a dazzling red—the effect of the pallor in which they shone ; her nose was small but straight ; her eyes dark blue, and inclining to the almond-shape ; the eye-lashes long and heavy ; the eye-brows straight and lightly marked ; the forehead broad and low.

‘Balzac,’ remarked Mortimer to himself, having rapidly appreciated all Marjory’s points, ‘Balzac says that there are a hundred ways of being a blonde, but only one of being a brunette. There is something in it, for I never saw a brunette like this before ; she proves the rule.’

Ninian rose as she walked up the room and gave her his hand, which she took with a blush and a sweeping curtsey. She sat on a couch, and he placed his chair beside her.

‘Well, Marjory,’ said her aunt, rising, ‘you’ve done all you said you would do, and I hope you’re satisfied. I think you’d better go to bed now.’

‘No, aunt, I couldn’t sleep. You know quite well I never do in these hot nights.’

‘Then what are you going to do?’

‘I think we are going to talk,’ said Marjory, turning towards Ninian.

‘I have much to say,’ said he.

‘But this is folly and madness. I will not countenance it,’ said her aunt, marching to the door.

‘Cousin,’ said Mortimer, ‘you had better—’

‘Go to the kitchen, fool,’ said Ninian. ‘To the kitchen with you!’

‘Revenge!’ cried Mortimer.

‘You are to leave the room,’ said Ninian going towards Mortimer, who retreated to the door. Marjory’s aunt went out quickly, anticipating violence, and Ninian pushed Mortimer after her, saying, as he closed the door, ‘Let no one come here till I ring the bell.’

‘This is the last straw!’ cried Mortimer ;  
‘the last straw!’

Marjory had risen also, and faced Ninian as he turned from the door. She had intended to remonstrate, but the blaze of his eyes and the power in his expression and gesture stopped her. All she said was, ‘You see, I have put on a fancy dress too.’

But we require to follow Mortimer in the meantime.

‘Don’t,’ he said, withholding Marjory’s aunt, who was about to re-open the drawing-room door. ‘The man’s mad.’

‘But my niece!’ exclaimed the lady.

‘Must take care of herself.’

‘It is her fault, certainly.’

‘Will you allow me to explain how I became entangled with this insane fool?’

‘Yes ; come in here.’

She led the way into a little sitting-room and lit the gas, and Mortimer and she sat down together.

‘Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?’ asked the lady.

After Ninian’s free and easy style

Mortimer was delighted with this formality. 'Mr Cosmo Mortimer,' he replied. 'To whom have I the honour of making myself known?'

'Miss Thomsina Mercer,' said the lady.

'Shocking!' cried Mortimer, surprised at once out of his ceremony. 'My dear lady, I suppose you know that Mercer is a provostal name; half the old provosts of Perth were Mercers.'

'They were my ancestors,' said Miss Mercer.

'And Thomsina!' said Mortimer, with horror in his voice; 'have you not found the name a terrible infliction?'

'What do you mean, sir?' said Thomsina, slapping her fan together angrily.

'Pardon, pardon!' cried Mortimer. 'You must understand I have a theory of names, which tells me that you would fain be eccentric, but you are tied by a middle-class mode of thinking. You—'

'Mr Mortimer, is it you or your master who is mad? My name is no concern of yours. Tell me what is the mean-

ing of this night-wandering and masquerading.'

Mortimer plunged into a narrative of his adventures since his arrival in Mintern; and Miss Mercer, much impressed with the story, and in Mr Mortimer's favour, listened to the end without interrupting him.

'How much truth,' asked Mortimer, when he had done, 'or is there any, in this story of the Chevalier de St George?'

'I never heard it before,' said Miss Mercer; 'but I believe I know the source of it, and I shall tell you. But is it not terrible, when you think of it, Mr Mortimer? Here are we talking at half-past one o'clock in the morning as unconcernedly and as intimately as if it were broad daylight and we had known each other for twenty years! But I am done with my niece henceforth, her and her whims. She is a most dreadful girl, Mr Mortimer, and is the cause of the gravest anxiety to her relations. We don't know how or when it got there, but there is bad blood in the family, Mr Mortimer. It

appears at irregular intervals, and the first known appearance of it must, I think, have given rise to this theory of Mr Jamieson's about the Chevalier de St George. The Marjory Morton of that time certainly had a son who was called James Jamieson, but, Mr Mortimer, so was his father before him. He was the coachman, and Marjory ran off with him to Gretna Green. He was killed at Sheriffmuir, and she returned to her father. Her son is the ancestor of the Provost of Mintern. The Mortons have always ignored the Jamiesons, though quite aware of their existence. I don't suppose that a single Morton has been in Mintern for several generations. It was not to be thought of while the shop filled one side of the principal square, and the "Dunmyatt Whisky" in tartan letters appeared wherever a bill could be stuck ; and still less now that a Jamieson is Provost. What would my brother-in-law say if he knew who was in the house at this moment ?'

'He is a thorough-going impostor, then, this diamond-making Provost?'





‘Undoubtedly.’

‘I shall expose him in the newspapers.’

‘Will you? In what paper?’

‘I don’t know; but I shall do it. Justice as well as vengeance requires it.’

‘The *Mintern Gazette* would be glad of any attack on the Provost; and I think you would be perfectly justified, Mr Mortimer; you, a man of position, of means, and of culture, forced to submit to the indignities you have mentioned, in giving him a thorough scarifying.’

‘I’ll scarify him—I’ll skin him alive!’ said Mortimer. ‘I’ll do it at once. When is the paper published?’

‘On Saturday, so there is no hurry.’

‘This is Thursday—no, Friday morning. There’s not much time to lose.’

‘You must get a sleep first, Mr Mortimer. I am certain my brother-in-law would esteem it an honour to have you in Tullibolton House.’

Mortimer bowed profoundly.

‘I was accounting to you as far as possible,’ continued Miss Mercer, ‘for Marjory’s ab-

surditities, to call them by a gentle name. There have been two Marjories between the one that married the coachman and the present one. The Maggies, the Janets, the Lizzies of the family have all been jewels of women, but in the Marjories the bad blood appears. One of them married her father's undergardener, and the other eloped with a commercial traveller. What this one will do heaven only knows! You see how she behaves. Imagine, Mr Mortimer! We had a long discussion about the men of the present generation—my niece and I. It lasted till eleven o'clock. She declared that there wasn't a spark of chivalry left among them; that the getting hold of money and the spending it on themselves was all they lived for; that they were all cowards—and I'm sure I don't remember all she said. I reminded her of Gordon, but she burst out, "Why isn't every man a Gordon?" and she wouldn't listen to me. She said the women were fools and cowards too, and instanced me, Mr Mortimer, if you please, because with my £200 a year I didn't "do something."

She challenged me to ride with her a mile along the road at midnight. I was angry and accepted the challenge, not foreseeing the disastrous results—I mean, for her. For myself I have to thank this mad-brained expedition, because it has gained me your acquaintance, Mr Mortimer.'

'I could almost forgive Jamieson's insults on the same account, madam,' said Mortimer.

The pair becked and bowed, and Thom-sina blushed, and Mortimer's vanity was gratified after the rough usage it had received at the hands of the Provost.

'I wasn't to be outdone,' continued Thom-sina, 'so I said to Marjory, "You have bragged a deal. Will you take a pistol with you, and if we meet one of these cowardly men demand his money or his life?" "I will," she said, "and he'll give me his money or run away." "He won't," I said. "If he doesn't," says she, firing up, "I'll marry him, or give you my diamond brooch."'

'Oho!' cried Mortimer. 'I understand what you two said to each other now. Didn't

you say, "You've lost, Marjory," and she answered, "Or won, aunt"?''

'Exactly.'

'And would she marry the Provost, do you think?'

'A very likely thing, if for no other reason than to spite her family.'

'She must be a terrible creature.'

'She is, indeed, Mr Mortimer. The rest of the family, except her father, are in Switzerland; but she wouldn't go. She said she had made a vow never to leave Scotland again, and nothing would move her. She couldn't be left here alone, so I was told off to watch her, in the hope, as she hates me, that she would break her absurd vow. But no; so here we are.'

'A very remarkable girl; very. Marjory Morton—a difficult name to deal with.'

'And a difficult woman, Mr Mortimer.'

'Evidently.'

'Now, what is to be done?'

'Where's her father?'

'In London. He wishes to enter Par-

liament at next election, and he is endeavouring to secure the support of the leaders.'

'Then he must be telegraphed for at once.'

'That's my idea too.'

'Miss Mercer, you are a woman of intellect and of daring. How to reconcile these qualities with your name, if you will allow me the remark, is more than I can say in the meantime; but I shall work out the problem.'

'Thank you,' said Thomsina, drily.

'I see,' said Mortimer, 'that it is a delicate subject with you, and I do not wonder at it. Thomsina Mercer is, to all appearance, a name incapable of greatness. Now, there are elements of greatness in your character. Why not do as other women with unfortunate names have done? Look at Marian Evans. Do you think these paltry syllables would have developed the genius of George Eliot? But I'll go thoroughly into the matter at leisure. Now, if you give me writing materials, I'll pen an exposure of this

wretched impostor and take it to Mintern at once.'

'And the telegram?'

'I'll look after that too.'

'But we always send our telegrams from Perth. It's quite as near as Mintern. My brother-in-law will be scandalised at receiving a telegram from Mintern.'

'Does he carry his resentment so far as that?'

'He is terribly touchy on the point. His health has never been what it was since the "Dunmyatt Whisky" came out.'

'I like him—I like a man who can be extreme. Depend upon it, Miss Mercer—but what is his first name?'

'Andrew.'

'A good name, though common. There is the possibility of a sound reputation in Andrew Morton, especially if he narrows himself down to a point, as I've no doubt he will. He will never be a great statesman, but he would make a very good chairman of committees.'

Miss Mercer again invited Mortimer to

take some rest, but he declared he couldn't. Half bewildered and half offended she took him to the library, where he soon wrought himself to a white heat over his paper for the *Mintern Gazette*.

## CHAPTER V

### MARJORY MORTON

MARJORY MORTON was capable of making a good remark in trying circumstances, and in a shipwreck or a fire would have been cool among the coolest. The novelty of her midnight adventure excited her, but the press of ideas made her feel as if she were in a blind alley; hence the inferiority of her remark when she was alone with Ninian, 'You see I have put on a fancy dress too.'

'Miss Morton,' he began, and stopped. He was affected in the same way as Marjory, though in a less degree. He pressed his head with both hands and shook back his hair. In the action he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror and felt at once what was wrong. *Miss Morton* did not suit his



violet velvet and white silk, or her brocaded gown and pearled head-dress.

'Lady,' he said, lingering on the word, 'my time is brief, but I must have you on my side, though I spend the night in persuading you.'

He led her to the couch, and took the chair he had placed beside it. He then stated his claim to the crown of Britain, and told her more powerfully than he had told Mortimer of his struggles with himself. When he had finished he rose and said, 'Do you acknowledge me?'

'I do not know,' said Marjory, looking at the floor with knitted brows.

'I am sorry,' said Ninian; 'I feel that my fate depends on you. If you acknowledge me I shall go on hopefully; if not, in despair.'

'Why?'

'If you do not acknowledge me, who will? Because you have faith in romance, and are in sympathy with all noble aspiration, I think you have sympathy with me.'

‘I have,’ she said musingly. ‘I am sick of the life I have led, and mean to lead it no more; and I love Scotland as I think nobody else loves it now—as Burns loved it, and Scott loved it.’

She was anxious to speak if this strange handsome man with his dark eyes and deep tender voice would only help her. She had never before talked with anyone to whom she felt she could explain herself. He did help her.

‘So do I,’ he said. ‘I would be content to be king of Scotland, and leave the rest of the Empire to the House of Brunswick. But it would require to be repeopled. They say there are more Scotchmen in London than there are in Edinburgh. I would bring all these prodigals back, and from the colonies, and America.’

‘It is shameful,’ she burst out, ‘how Scotchmen forsake their country! I am almost a socialist in some things, but I would preserve nationalities. My ambition comes far short of yours, still it is high-flown enough. I would like to see Edin-

burgh once more the home of the Scotch nobility ; to see it a literary centre rivaling London and Paris. And it could be done so easily. If the Duke of Weimar with his small income could gather together Goethe, Schiller, and the wit and wisdom of Germany, surely a Scotch nobleman could gather about him in Edinburgh all the eminent Scotchmen. That would make us a nation once more.'

'But a king would be infinitely better,' said Ninian.

'Perhaps.'

'It is certain. When they cut off my great ancestor's head they did not know that they struck a blow at England and Scotland, at every nation on the face of the earth. Monarchy and Nationality are the head and the body. There are Frenchmen, but no French nation ; Americans, but no American nation. Wherever there is a monarch there is a nation ; and the more absolute the monarchy the more marked the nationality. I will be king of Scotland—I will be king of Scotland.'

He advanced to within a foot of her and stood, his hands before him, one holding the other by the wrist. She looked up, and seemed unable to meet his glance.

'Am I the king?' he asked, under his breath.

'I do not know.'

He turned from her and paced the room. She looked at his feet, then her eyes gradually crept up to his face. She was still watching the rapid change of expression that crossed it when he came towards her again and caught her glance. This time she returned his gaze.

'I *am* the king,' he said.

'But'—she hesitated—'the proof?'

'Do you think that I could be king?'

'Yes.'

'Then you must not doubt my word.

'But there may be a mistake.'

'Impossible; I have the documents; you shall see them.'

She bowed and said nothing, and he stood looking at her. Her eyes fell, and

were again raised with an inquiring glance which Ninian understood.

‘I haven’t brought them with me,’ he said; ‘but I can get them. To-night!— I will get them to-night. I ought to have them with me. Where is my fool?’

‘Oh, not to-night!’ she said.

‘He can ride. You will lend him a horse.’

He was about to ring when Marjory said, ‘Do not; there is no one to answer. I will go for him.’

It is well to note that the interview between Marjory and Ninian had been of some duration. Long pauses had occurred; and Ninian’s account of himself, omitted in our narrative, took up a considerable time.

Marjory returned in a few minutes with Miss Mercer, whom she had found dozing in an arm-chair in the library.

‘Where is my fool?’ said Ninian.

‘Mr Mortimer,’ said Thomsina, with dignity, ‘has left Tullibolton.’

‘Without my permission! The knave! Where has he gone?’

'To Mintern.'

'When did the rascal go?'

Thomsina gave no answer.

'Do you hear? When did he go?'

'Sir,' said Thomsina, with an oblique motion of the head and a prolonged droop and gradual upheaval of the eyelids, 'I am not in the habit of being talked to in this way, nor of hearing my personal friends denominated rascals.'

'I was not aware that you knew Cosmo.'

'I do know him now,' she said. 'He is a gentleman of birth and breeding, for whom I have a great respect.'

'Why, you've only known him an hour,' said Marjory.

'How long have you, mademoiselle, known this person?'

Thomsina indicated Ninian with another oblique gesture of disdain. To her delight she found she had delivered a home-thrust, for her niece blushed and said nothing.

'My good woman,' said Ninian, 'when did Cosmo go?'

'Mademoiselle' is a term of reproach in

Scotland, more stinging even than 'person'; but it is safer to call a French general a liar than to address any female as 'My good woman.'

'You are a crack-brained, low-born fellow,' said Thomsina, passing to the door with extreme obliquity. 'I laugh at you and scorn you, and you will be the laughing-stock and scorn of the world before the week's out. And you, Marjory!—you dupe, you fool, you can only save your character by bidding him go. I wash my hands of you.' She left the room with a slow step, closing the door softly behind her—an affectation of coolness which failed to exasperate either Ninian or Marjory.

'The flight of Cosmo,' said Ninian, 'is rather annoying. But why should it trouble me? If he does as he threatened it will give me publicity, and once in the newspapers there is no halting, no turning back. I should like to go to bed now, if you please. To-morrow I will get the documents.'

Marjory in silence showed him to a bedroom, and in a few minutes he was sound

asleep; but she walked her room till the cocks were crowing and the sun was above the hills, then she burst into tears and threw herself upon her bed. She had hardly done so when someone passed her room stealthily and went downstairs. Without any hesitation she followed and found Ninian opening the front door.

‘Why do you steal away like this?’ she asked.

He blushed and hung his head.

‘I trusted you,’ she said, without any clear meaning in her mind.

‘Lady, I am a coward,’ said Ninian. ‘Let me go.’

‘Go!’

‘But that is neither the word nor the tone which a man obeys.’

‘I thought you were a coward?’

‘I am,’ he said, with humility. ‘I am flying from temptation instead of facing it.’

‘Temptation!’

‘Yes. What was the besetting sin of the Stuarts?’



Marjory considered her answer ; she was not going to be silenced by plain speaking.'

'Random love,' she said.

'No,' said Ninian, talking rapidly, 'it was not that, but an unmanly yielding to the influence of women. Henrietta Maria was much more fatal to Charles I. than all his Nell Gwyns to the Merry Monarch. Think of Flora Macdonald. Prince Charles should have died at Culloden ; failing that, he should have given himself up. His death on the scaffold would have been the salvation of his house ; and he would have been beheaded in spite of his cowardice had not that woman protected him. I have all the Stuarts' passionate adoration of woman unsullied, and were I not a king I would make some woman happy ; but a king, least of all a Stuart king, should never love.'

'But why should you leave the house without bidding me good-bye?'

'Lady, you torture me. I dreamt of you. You were my wife. We lived in Holyrood ; and our rooms were filled nightly by poets and painters, philosophers and men of science.

Edinburgh was the intellectual capital of the world ; and though I was not the king you were queen. I am tempted to turn aside from my path ; but I am not fit to be king if I cannot at least fly from temptation. I take it that destiny brought us together to try me.'

'And me ?' said Marjory.

'You !' exclaimed Ninian, stunned. 'I never thought of you.'

'Your egotism is sublime,' said Marjory.

'Farewell,' said Ninian, turning from her suddenly. He ran away at the top of his speed, and did not slacken it until he was out of Marjory's sight. She watched him vanishing, and stretched out her hands after him.

## CHAPTER VI

### COSMO AND THOMSINA

THE first visitor on Friday morning at the office of the *Mintern Gazette* was Cosmo Mortimer, dressed in his own serviceable pepper and salt, sleepy looking and rather pale for him, but ready as ever at a moment's notice to theorise on anything. On arriving at the Provost's house he had persuaded the servants that he was on their master's business. He had slept for an hour or two; at eight he had breakfasted; at half-past eight he had removed his traps to the *Mintern Arms*; and at nine he was astonishing Mr Adie, the editor of the *Mintern Gazette*, with the history and theory of Ninian Jamieson.

'And now, sir,' he said, 'having made an end of my introductory remarks, I come to the object of my visit. I have here in the shape

of a letter to you an exposure of this madman couched in the most sarcastic terms. It will rejoice the hearts of all his enemies, and be gall and wormwood to his friends. Every word of it stings, and I have signed it "Castigator." I believe in anonymity. The ministers of Nature's justice are anonymous—flood, fire, famine and fever—and so am I, in a double sense.' Cosmo was thinking of a certain Hugh Smith.

'Let me see it,' said the editor drily.

Cosmo handed over the letter.

'On second thoughts, it's no use,' said the editor, returning the manuscript without looking at it. 'I have persistently attacked the Provost because I think him a most unsuitable man—'

'Error, error!' burst in Cosmo. 'Magistracy is what nature intended him for. Names, my dear sir—'

'I was saying,' resumed the editor, regardless of the interruption, 'that Jamieson is totally unfitted for the provostship, but I'm going to leave him alone in the meantime, as I never hit a man when he's down.'

'Down!' exclaimed Mortimer.

'Yes,' said the editor, picking up a proof which he had been correcting when Mortimer entered the shop — 'down. See.'

Mortimer read the paragraph which the editor indicated.

'That's the full meaning of the name, is it?' he cried in great excitement. 'This is a new light. Good-morning, sir, and thank you.'

'A new light!' he repeated as he hurried out of the shop. 'Tullibolton House,' he said to the driver, as he got into a cab. 'A new light!' he repeated to himself.

Miss Mercer was at breakfast when he arrived.

'Mr Mortimer!' she exclaimed. 'I am so glad to see you again, and in your own clothes.'

'Madam,' said Mortimer, 'give me a cup of tea.'

'Certainly, Mr Mortimer. And how did you get on with the editor?'

'Madam, let me drink the tea.'

‘Surely, Mr Mortimer, surely, You must be tired. How thoughtless of me!’

‘Madam,’ said Mortimer, having taken the tea at a draught, ‘I have news. There is something besides eccentricity in the name Ninian. Jamieson I analysed correctly—commercial prosperity and civic honour; but I failed with Ninian, because I have hitherto omitted in my theory an element which must enter into the composition of many names. Besides eccentricity, Ninian spells—what do you think?—bankruptcy.

‘You startle me, Mr Mortimer.’

‘The Provost is to-day a pauper.’

‘How shocking! I understood he was very rich.’

‘He was, madam, in affluent circumstances. To-day he hasn’t a penny.’

‘Dear me! What has brought about this change?’

‘He has been speculating. I know no details, but it is certain he is bankrupt. I should like to see him now. I shall exult in his fall; I shall crow over him to his face. Lead me to him, madam, if you please.’

'He is not here.'

'Not here!'

'No, he went away early in the morning.'

'Where has he gone?'

'I don't know.'

'Does Miss Morton know?'

'I don't think so.'

'But he has certainly left Tullibolton?'

'There's no doubt of it.'

'So much the better—so much the better! He will go about making a fool of himself all the longer, for I would have told him of his bankruptcy had I seen him—I couldn't have helped it; and that would have put an end to his campaign at once.'

'Did you telegraph for Mr Morton?'

'I forgot all about it, madam.'

'I'm just as glad since Jamieson has gone away of his own accord. However, I shall write Mr Morton myself now, giving up all charge of Marjory. After last night what she needs is a strait-jacket and douche-baths; an aunt is no check on her, Mr Mortimer.'

‘And what will *you* do then, madam?’

‘I’m sure I don’t know, Mr Mortimer. My relations are tired of me long ago, and as soon as I cease to be useful to them they will cast me on the world without a home or a friend—with nothing but my £200 a year.’

‘Do not despond, Miss Mercer. In my opinion it is desirable that you should be severed from your friends and relations, because you can change your name.’

‘Oh, Mr Mortimer!’

‘But you can. It doesn’t cost a very great deal, and you can go at once among strangers who will never know. To attempt a change of name among one’s intimates is simply to stick in your hat, as it were, “Jokes shot here.”’

‘Then,’ said Thomsina, falteringly, ‘you mean that I should change my name myself.’

‘Certainly, madam. I changed mine. My patronymic was simply fatal to greatness, and my Christian name a libel; I was called Hugh Smith; but I refused to be the



victim of such a dastardly conspiracy, and took my present name. You, madam, can do the same.'

'Oh, Mr Mortimer!'

'You can. Have you any idea what you would like to be called?'

'Then,' said Thomsina, more falteringly, 'you do not mean that I should take your name. I thought you said I could "do the same."''

'If you like. The effect upon myself, madam, since I became Cosmo Mortimer, more than surprises me. I am healthier, I am wiser, I am more courageous, I am better looking, and I believe, madam, that I have actually grown in stature half an inch, and I didn't change my name till I was thirty. But it doesn't follow that Mortimer would have the same effect on you as on me. Indeed, I think you'd better take something else.'

'You will excuse my question,' said Thomsina, in a low voice, 'but the great interest you take in names and in me prompts it. What do you think of the

ordinary method of changing women's names?'

'What is that?' asked Mortimer, briskly.

'By marriage.'

'Ha!' said Mortimer, 'I am totally unable to say. Mrs Shakespeare wasn't a great woman, but Lady William Russell was. There were three noteless Mrs Miltons, but one Madame Roland, one Mrs Carlyle. This is an exceedingly difficult aspect of the subject, and I should say it would be impossible to arrive at a theory without personal experience. Not until I had changed my own name did I begin clearly to appreciate the immense importance of nomenclature. So, I should suppose, were I to take a wife I would, in time, understand the effect of a change of name by marriage in the characters of women.'

'It would be a very interesting study,' said Thomsina.

'It would indeed,' said Cosmo.

He pondered, while she cut a small finger of toast into a dozen pieces.

'Why did you never marry, Miss Mercer?' said Cosmo.

'Well,' she said, 'I think it was because of my name. Whoever would marry a woman called Thomsina! Besides, I never cared for the men who wanted me, and the men didn't care for me whom I wanted.'

There was some calculation in this answer: the concession to Cosmo's theory in the first part of it, and the common sense of the second, were not without their result. Cosmo looked at her steadily and then said, 'You would like to be capable of greatness, Miss Mercer?'

'I would indeed, Mr Mortimer.'

'And I should like to try it.'

'To try what, Mr Mortimer?'

'Marriage.'

'Oh, Mr Mortimer.'

'I should like to make a scientific study of the change in character produced in a woman by taking her husband's name. Mrs Cosmo Mortimer,' he murmured. 'Mrs Cosmo Mortimer. Why, it might

develop genius in a rag-picker! Madam, will you be Mrs Cosmo Mortimer?’

‘Yes,’ said Thomsina, softly, but with a certain fulness of affirmation. Cosmo stepped up promptly and kissed her on the cheek, then he looked earnestly into her eyes as if expecting to see signs of a change in her character already. She dropped her eyelids and laid her hand on his; he kissed her hand, and resumed his seat; she mechanically finished her toast, and he watched her in silence. Thomsina grew very uncomfortable, and Cosmo was beginning to think of something to say—usually a needless preliminary with him—when Marjory entered the room. She bowed to Cosmo and wished her aunt good-morning.

‘Good-morning, Marjory,’ said Thomsina. ‘The diamond brooch is mine.’

‘How so?’

‘The Provost is bankrupt.’

‘Bankrupt!’

‘Yes,’ said Thomsina. ‘Wild as you are, you will hardly wed a pauper.’

‘Bankrupt!’ repeated Marjory, sighing like one before whom a beautiful vision fades away.

‘I will wear the brooch at my marriage.’

‘At your marriage!’ said Marjory, with wide eyes.

‘Miss Morton,’ said Cosmo, ‘your aunt is to be Mrs Cosmo Mortimer.’

‘I wish you joy,’ said Marjory, looking from one to the other, amazed and amused. Then she left the room, suppressing a laugh.

‘Cosmo,’ said Thomsina, after she had gone, ‘do you love me very much?’

‘What!’ cried Cosmo, starting from his seat. ‘Do I love you? Love!—Madam, madam, do you know what love is?’

‘Yes,’ said Thomsina, ‘I will love my husband.’

‘Love your husband! Madam, such talk is intolerable between persons of our age.’

‘Then, why do you wish to marry me?’

‘I have told you, madam: to study the

effect of my name upon you. I thought you understood that clearly. You see, you are a most suitable subject. You have lived for many years under an abominable name, by which your character has been reduced to zero, so that the slightest upward tendency will be visible at once. You are old enough—at least, I thought you were—to perceive the nonsense of love and all that sort of thing. I wish to marry you as an experiment in a science of which I am the discoverer—a science calculated to revolutionise the world. The name equates the character; raise the power of the name and you raise that of the character. Don't you see, man?' cried Cosmo, enthusiastically, forgetting the sex of his hearer. 'All the sin and misery, the folly and madness of the world, is the result of nomenclature. Look here. Take a dozen burglars; give them five years each, and let them out again under their own names; ten of them will be sentenced to ten years within as many months. Take another dozen

burglars, and let the Home Secretary change their names; he might call Sikes, Wilberforce—Fagin, Howard—and so on; give them no punishment, no police supervision: I tell you within six months every one of the twelve will have honest money in the savings-bank—I know it. And the world in its heart knows it. How could it have produced the proverb “Call a man a thief and he’ll steal” if it didn’t? And the Popes know it. Why else do they change their names on their elevation? And titles! Think of titles. When you make a man a duke, do you think it doesn’t change his character? I tell you if you were to take a small village in France and change the names of all the inhabitants to Smith, Brown, Jones, Robinson, and so on, within six months that village would be dining on beef-steak and Bass’s beer and taking in the *Times*. The world’s all wrong from the Czar of Russia to the anarchist who flings a bomb into a children’s hospital. Look here, man: call earth heaven, and raise the power of every other

name in proportion, and you would *have* heaven.'

'Then, Mr Mortimer, you don't love me?'

'I should think not! I have no objection to the word "love," either as a noun or as a verb, but I have insuperable objections to what is understood by love, and more especially to what women understand by love. You see—'

'Mr Mortimer,' said Miss Mercer, rising—and anger made her beautiful,—'I am not a young woman, and I am vain and foolish, but I will never marry a man who thinks of love as you do. I long to be a bride, and I long to be a wife, and to be a mother, but I feel that all that is nothing to the love of a man. I thank you, Mr Mortimer, for the offer of your *name*. Good-bye.'

She swept out of the room, as red as a rose and as lovely as her niece. She sobbed for half-an-hour, and then sought Marjory.

'You have been crying, aunt,' said Marjory.



‘And so have you,’ said Thomsina.

Quickly these two women, more than indifferent before, found a way into each other's hearts.

## CHAPTER VII

### NINIAN AND MARJORY

Cosmo, disgusted with Thomsina's unscientific spirit, drove back to Mintern, soliloquising all the way.

'Women,' he said, 'are fools. The only hope for them is to change their appellation. Look at George Sand, George Eliot, Currer Bell! It was only by imagining themselves men that those women wrote their great novels; and the softer sex cannot be hardened until the word "woman" is abolished, and the word "man" substituted for it. All children must be called boys, and all adults men. It's infallible. Change the name and you change the thing. There's no getting over that. I am astonished that the importance of theory has never been recognised. Make

a generalisation, believe it, act upon it, and there you are!’

In this strain he continued until he arrived at the Mintern Arms. After lunch he went to fish, and lashed the water till five o’clock, catching nothing with much theoretical satisfaction. On his way home a voice hailed him. He looked behind, and saw a tall figure in a long waterproof running towards him. It was the Provost.

‘Well, Cosmo,’ said Ninian, when he came up to him, ‘I hope you’ve had good sport.’

‘I have,’ said Cosmo. ‘I hadn’t a single rise, and I’ve caught a cold.’

‘I’m very glad,’ said Ninian, laughing. ‘By-the-bye, have you any theory about putting your hand to the plough and turning back?’

‘I have,’ said Cosmo. ‘I could expound it better, however, if you would give me the example that occurs to you.’

‘It is myself. I am, as you see, returning, and you know how little is accomplished.’

‘I must know why you are returning.’

‘Certainly. I left Tullibolton House very early this morning and walked rapidly for two hours. Then I began to be hungry, so I went into a little cottage by the way-side and supped two plates of porridge which I found sitting on the kitchen table. I had just finished when a young couple came in together. The wife had made the porridge and then gone out for her husband, who was working in a field at hand. They were too much surprised, and even awed, to say anything. I apologised for the liberty I had taken; said they would be no losers by me, and remembered that I hadn’t a farthing. This confused me a little, which the ploughman observed. He said, “You’ll be one o’ these circus billies, I’m thinkin’; but there’s naebody here gaun tae laugh at your tricks. Pay doon a saxpence, or come oot and fecht.” Now, though I never went twice a week to the Bois de Boulogne, I can box a bit, Cosmo, so I accepted his challenge. One round was sufficient, as the good fellow had no science; and I

rather astonished him by holding his wife with my left hand—for she attacked me tooth and nail—while I settled him with my right. I cut off one of my buttons and gave it to the woman, telling her it was worth many sixpences, shook hands with her husband, and went on my way. Something led me to Dunmyatt, and I spent the forenoon on the top of it. On the way down a new idea occurred to me. Stirling Castle, which is the noblest feature in the view from Dunmyatt, suggested it. “What a magnificent residence for a king!” I thought. You know I am now going to confine my ambition to Scotland. “From the windows of that palace a Scottish king can look on half his realm, with the broad Forth winding slowly to the Scottish sea. Stirling Bridge and Bannockburn are at his feet. In all the world there is no such home for a patriot king. Could I not take up my abode in the town, form a party in the garrison, and seize the castle? To be King of Scotland for one week, for one day, in Stirling Castle, with the block for a pillow

at night, would be worth more to me than any life lived in this century." I resolved to make the attempt, and then came in the question of money and of the proofs of my descent. Could I go on as I had started, and without my documents? I could write for some money, but in the meantime what was I to do? It was neither documents, however, nor the money, so much as a ring I had forgotten that decided me. As I could not bear to fail ignominiously, or to perish meanly, I have provided myself with poison in a ring. I forgot it in the hurry last night, and for that I have returned. I went down to Blairlogie, bought this old waterproof with another button—it was necessary to hide my dress as I had changed my plan—and here I am. Now what do you think of my turning back?'

'I haven't got all the data,' said Cosmo. 'What were you thinking of all the forenoon on the top of Dunmyatt?'

'Ha! I was dreaming, dreaming.'

'Of what?'

'Of being king in Holyrood.'

‘And as you came down the hill your dream changed to Stirling.’

‘It did.’

‘And who was your queen in this dream of yours?’

‘My queen!’ exclaimed Ninian, blushing.

‘Of course. “Find the woman” is an ancient saying.’

‘It’s of no consequence. I’ve dreamt of hundreds of women in my life, and thought I loved some, but I’m a bachelor still.’

‘I can tell who was your queen. It was Marjory Morton, and she is the cause of your turning back, and not your ring, or your documents, or the want of money. I will wager half my salary that you purpose setting out for Stirling to-night by way of Tullibolton House.’

‘Cosmo, you are a wise fool. That is my intention. What do you think now?’

‘That your turning back is fatal to your plan.’

‘Why? Because of Marjory?’

‘No; because of money. Had the desire to find a means of seeing Marjory again

not suggested an errand back to Mintern you would have gone on, trusting to your pistol for an emergency such as you fear, without money and without documents, to *some* end. Now you have made money the basis of your plan, and you will fail—fail immediately.'

'Why do you think so? But here we are at my house. You can explain yourself further when we go in.'

'I'm not going in.'

'Oh, yes, you are!'

'But I have ordered dinner at the Mintern Arms.'

'Never mind. Come away. You must come.'

'Well,' thought Cosmo, 'I want to see how he takes his bankruptcy; but I'll submit to no more hectoring.'

Having satisfied his vanity with this resolution he accompanied Ninian. They entered at the back and passed through the kitchen.

'Is dinner ready?' Ninian asked.

'Yes, sir,' answered the cook.



‘How!’ exclaimed Cosmo. ‘Did they know you were coming?’

‘No.’

‘Then why have they prepared dinner?’

‘You forget. I am only one in this house. My presence or absence never affects the dinner.’

‘Well,’ thought Cosmo, snuffing the air, ‘I’ll let him have one good dinner before the deluge.’

‘And now,’ said Ninian, in the study after dinner, ‘you say that I must fail because I am trusting to my money.’

‘I say so,’ said Cosmo. ‘I have an intuitive feeling—something like prophecy, perhaps—that your wealth is as unstable as your dreams, and will take to itself wings.’

‘Have you no theory?’

‘Not in this case; instinct, pure and simple.’

‘But surely you could make a theory. I am in the humour to be amused. And that reminds me that you haven’t your fool’s dress on, Master Cosmo; and that

you ran away from Tullibolton, Master Cosmo; and I shall require to punish you, Master Cosmo, but I bear you no ill-will, remember. I can whip you when you change your dress. Come upstairs.'

'I will not change my dress, and you shall not whip me.'

'Now, what an ass you are! You know perfectly well that you will have to do just as I like.'

'Never again, Master Jamieson. You have overshot yourself, Master Jamieson; you are bought and sold, Master Jamieson. I see an ominous missive on your desk, Master Jamieson; you had better read it.'

From several unopened letters Cosmo chose one in a large blue envelope with the London postmark and handed it to Ninian, who took it in a dazed way. Staring blankly at Cosmo, he opened the envelope, and then with a shiver turned his eyes on the letter. After reading it twice he staggered from the room, crushing the letter with both hands. In a few minutes he returned, followed by the pretty maid-



servant with a decanter of the 'Dunmyatt Whisky' and two horns. Having filled the horns she withdrew. Ninian was very white, but he now walked with a firm step. He took from his desk a roll of manuscript, and before sitting down, handed one of the horns to Cosmo, who noticed for the first time a large ring with a bloodstone on the Provost's left hand.

'My very good friend,' said Ninian, 'let us pledge each other.'

He emptied his horn, but Cosmo drank only a little of his.

'My money and my dreams have melted away,' said Ninian. 'My imagination, like a bird plunged suddenly into a dungeon, dashes blindly against stony blackness. It is hard—it is terrible. Do you not think it possible? Do you believe that if I had spent my whole capital, my hundred and fifty thousand, in bribing the garrison that I couldn't have reigned in Stirling for one day? You neither know me nor the power of money if you think so. All gone—all gone! My father left it safe; why wasn't

I content? Cosmo, keep clear of Asiatic coal and gold.'

'You forget. I have an annuity.'

'An annuity; ay, you are wise. Perhaps you think of writing my life, Cosmo. I charge you not to do so. If you speak of me at all, say that I had the faults of the Stuarts, but that I knew it and strove to conquer them. Should anyone in your hearing talk of me as mad, say to him that I was not mad, but that after reading two thousand novels I learnt who I was; that, I think, will explain my mistakes. This is my pedigree,' he said with a faint smile, shaking out the manuscript which he held in his hand. 'It is useless now, as I have no heir.'

He glanced through the pages, and then lighting them with a match, burnt them to ashes.

'You will go to-morrow to Tullibolton and tell Marjory that I loved her.'

When he had said that, Ninian raised his left hand to his mouth. Cosmo heard a slight click and sprang towards him. At

the same time wheels sounded on the gravel outside. Ninian's hand fell, and something dropped lightly on the floor.

'Who can it be?' he said hoarsely.

He stood listening; and Cosmo watched him silently until the footman came.

'A lady to see you, sir,' he said.

'Who is it?'

'She won't give her name.'

Ninian rushed to the drawing-room and found Marjory Morton.

'I did not think you would be at home. I had no intention of seeing you when I called,' she said.

She was standing in the centre of the room, one hand clutching the other convulsively. Her hair had lost its curl and hung in tangles; her lips were white and thin, and the roundness seemed gone from her cheeks; but her eyes shone. Ninian, looking in her face, touched her on the shoulder and stepped back.

'I hardly know why I am here,' she continued. 'The servant said you were at home and I came in. I wanted to leave'

something, and asked, without thinking, when you would be home, and the servant said you were in. Oh! I have brought you some money I don't need.'

She took some money from her pocket and laid it on a table with an inlaid marble top. In doing so, her eyes caught a crack in one of the pieces, and she traced it carefully with her finger-nail.

'Good-bye,' she said, looking up.

'Why have you brought me money?' asked Ninian.

'You are bankrupt, are you not?'

'How should you know?—I am.'

'Then you must be needing money.'

'But—'

'Ask me nothing. Let me go.'

She had seized the door-handle before Ninian could stop her. When she felt his grasp on her arm she stood passively.

'Marjory,' said Ninian, with his mouth at her ear.

She turned and tried to look at him, but her eyelids fell in spite of an effort that made her tremble from head to foot.

‘Marjory,’ he said again.

Paler than before, and shaking, she leant against the door. Ninian gathered her up in his arms. He also shook, and stumbling into a low chair nearly let her fall; she felt him reeling and, clasped him instinctively.

‘Marjory,’ he said a third time.

Her mouth was still sealed, but she did not relax her grasp; her eyes were tightly closed—so tightly that her brows were contracted. He bent over her and sought through her eyelids for her eyes; he searched her brow in a strong endeavour to fathom her mind; he kissed her mouth, hoping to reach her heart—a long kiss, for she did not move until he raised his head to look at her. He marvelled at the change. Her eyes were closed but a tear hung on each eyelid; a deep blush had restored the form to her cheek, and her lips had grown full and red; her very hair had come alive again, the gold about her temples shone, and the tangles began to crisp. She opened her eyes slowly, the long lashes shook off the tear-drops and the black living pupil

filled up the whole iris. He felt a beam of light pass from her eyes to his, and bent to kiss her again, but she hid her face in his breast. Then they said the things that lovers say.

‘Did you love me at the first?’ said she.

‘I loved you from the moment I saw you. And you?’

‘I haven’t slept since I met you at midnight.’

‘Did you really not expect to find me here?’

‘Really. I wished to be some place where you had been. I wished to do something connected with you. There’s fifty pounds. It’s not very much, but it may help you a little. I had thirty, and aunt lent me twenty.’

‘Your aunt? I thought she objected to me.’

‘But aunt and I are friends now.’

‘Fifty pounds,’ mused Ninian, smiling.

‘Dear—my dear!’

‘I suppose bankrupts are very poor?’

‘Sometimes.’



‘Are you very poor?’

‘Very.’

‘I’m very poor too. I’ve got nothing now, and I owe aunt twenty pounds. But I’m glad I’m poor, and I’m glad you’re poor. You’ll never mind being king now, dear.’

‘No.’

‘But you’ll show me the documents.’

‘They are burned.’

‘Burned! And were you coming to me?’

‘No.’

‘What were you going to do?’

‘I’ll tell you when we’re married.’

At that moment, had their ears not been throbbing with their own blood they would have heard Cosmo stealing from the door and muttering, ‘It is this love that spoils greatness and eccentricity.’ He returned to the study and picked from the floor a small blue crystal. Having wrapped it in a bit of an old letter he placed it in his vest pocket. Then he finished his whisky and left the house unobserved.

A PRACTICAL NOVELIST



# A PRACTICAL NOVELIST

## CHAPTER I

### BAGGING A HERO

‘WELL, but the novel is played out, Carry. It has run to seed. Anybody can get the seed; anybody can sow it. If it goes on at this rate, novel-writers will soon be in a majority, and novel-reading will become a lucrative employment.’

‘What are you going to do, then, Maxwell? Here’s Peter out of work, and my stitching can’t support three.’

The three in question were Maxwell Lee, his wife Caroline, and her brother, Peter Briscoe. Lee was an unsuccessful literary man; his brother-in-law, Briscoe, an unsuccessful business man. Caroline, on the

other hand, was entirely successful in an arduous endeavour to be a man, hoping and working for all three.

We have nothing whatever to do with the past of these people. We start with the conversation introduced in the first sentence. Caroline had urged on Lee the advisability of accepting an offer from the editor of a country weekly. But Lee, who had composed dramas and philosophical romances which no publisher nor editor could be got to read, refused scornfully the task of writing 'an ordinary, vulgar, sentimental and sensational story of the kind required.'

'What am I going to do?' he said. 'I'll tell you: I am going to create a novel. Practical joking is the new novel in its infancy. The end of every thought is an action; and the centuries of written fiction must culminate in an age of acted fiction. We stand upon the threshold of that age, and I am destined to open the door.'

Caroline sighed, and Briscoe shot out his underlip: evidence that they were accustomed to this sort of thing.

Lee continued: 'You shall collaborate with me in the production of this novel. Think of it! Novel-writing is effete; novel-creation is about to begin. We shall cause a novel to take place in the world. We shall construct a plot; we shall select a hero; we shall enter into his life, and produce the series of events before determined on. Consider for a minute. We can do nothing else now. The last development, the naturalist school, is a mere copying, a bare photographing of life—at least, that is what it professes to be. This is not art. There can never be an art of novel-writing. But there can be—there shall be, you will aid me to begin the art of novel-creation.'

'Do you propose to make a living by it?' inquired Briscoe.

'Certainly.'

Briscoe rose, and without comment left the house. Caroline looked at her husband with a glance of mingled pity and amusement.

'Why are you so fantastic?' she asked softly.

'You laugh at my idea now, because you

do not see it as I see it. Wait till it is completely developed before you condemn it.'

Caroline made no reply ; but went on with her sewing. Lee threw himself at full length on a rickety sofa and closed his eyes. Besides the sofa, two chairs and a table, a rag of carpet before the fireplace, a shelf with some books of poetry and novels, and an old oil painting in a dark corner, made up the furniture of the room. There were three other apartments, a kitchen and two bedrooms, all as scantily furnished. The house was in the top flat of a four-storey land in Peyton Street, Glasgow.

Lee dozed and dreamed. Caroline sewed steadily. An hour elapsed without a word from either. Then both were aroused by the noisy entrance of Briscoe, who, having let himself into the house by his latch-key, strode into the parlour with a portmanteau in either hand. He thrashed these down on the floor with defiant emphasis, and said, frowning away a grin : 'Your twin-brother's traps, Lee. I'll bring *him* upstairs, too.'

He went out immediately, as if afraid of being recalled.

‘Your twin-brother!’ exclaimed Mrs Lee. ‘I never heard of him.’

‘And I hear of him for the first time.’

They waited in amazement the return of Briscoe. Soon an irregular and shuffling tread sounded from the stair; and in a minute he and a cabman entered the parlour, bearing between them what seemed the lifeless body of a man. This they placed on the sofa. The cabman looked about him curiously; but, being apparently satisfied with his fare, withdrew.

When he was gone, Briscoe spoke: ‘This is the first chapter of your novel, Lee. Something startling to begin with, eh?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I’ve bagged a hero for you.’

‘Bagged a hero!’

‘Yes; kidnapped a millionaire in the middle of Glasgow in broad daylight. Here’s how it happened: one instant I saw a man with his head out of a cab-window, shouting to the driver; the next,



the cab-door, which can't have been properly fastened, sprang open, and the man was lying in the street. On going up to him, I said to myself, "Maxwell Lee, as I'm a sinner!" You're wonderfully like, even when I look at your faces alternately. Well, I shouted in his ear, "Chartres! Chartres!" seeing his name in his hat, which had fallen off, and pretending to know him perfectly. I felt so mad at you and your absurd notions of creating novels, that, without thinking of the consequences, I got him into the cab again, told the policeman that he was my brother-in-law, and drove straight here. It was all done so suddenly, and I assumed such confidence, that the police did not so much as demand my address. Of course, if you don't want to have anything to do with him, I suppose we can make it out a case of mistaken identity.'

'Who is he, I wonder?' said Lee, whose eyes were sparkling.

'There's his name and address,' replied Briscoe, pointing to the portmanteaus.

Lee read aloud: ‘“Mr Henry Chartres, Snell House, Gourock, N.B.”’ He then pressed his head in both hands, knit his brows, tightened his mouth, and regarded the floor for fully a minute.

As soon as Chartres had been laid on the sofa, Caroline wiped the mud from his face and hands. There was not a cushion in the room, but she brought two pillows from her own bed, and with them propped the head and shoulders of the unconscious man. While Lee was still contemplating the floor, she said, ‘We must get a doctor at once.’

Lee’s response was a muttered ‘Yes, yes;’ but the question brought him nearer the facts of the case than he had been since Briscoe explained his motive in possessing himself of Mr Chartres.

‘A doctor!’ repeated Caroline.

‘Of course, of course,’ said Lee, approaching the sofa for the first time. He studied the still unconscious face while Caroline and Briscoe watched him: the first wondering that he should seem to hesitate to send for a doctor, and the other with an incredulous

curiosity. Briscoe, an ill-natured, half-educated man, had been seized by a sudden inspiration on seeing the likeness between Chartres and his brother-in-law. He thought to over-set Lee's new idea by showing him its impracticability. He believed that failure had unhinged his brother-in-law's mind; and knew for certain that no argument could possibly avail. He trusted that by introducing Chartres under such extraordinary circumstances into what he regarded as Lee's insane waking dream the gross absurdity of it—absurd at least in his impecunious state—would become apparent to him. Having once unfixed this idea, he hoped, with the help of Mrs Lee, to force his acceptance of the commission for the country weekly. The result was not going to be what he expected. Lee was taking his brother's collaboration seriously. A childish smile of wonder and delight overspread his features, as his likeness to Chartres appeared more fully, in his estimation, upon a detailed examination. He got a looking-glass, and compared the two faces, placing

the mirror so that the reflection of his lay as if he had rested his head on Chartres's shoulder. Thick, soft, grey hair, inclined still to curl, and divided on the left side; a broad forehead, perpendicular for an inch above the eyebrows, then sloping inordinately to the beginning of the hair; eyebrows distinctly marked, but not heavy; a well-formed nose, rather long, and approaching the aquiline; full, curved lips; the mouth not small, but liker a woman's than a man's; the chin, almost feminine, little and rounded; the cheeks smooth, and the face clean shaved. There was no doubt that the men might have been twins, and that their most intimate associates would have been constantly mistaking them.

'It's wonderful—wonderful, Peter!' said Lee. 'What a brilliant stroke of yours this is!'

'But the doctor, Maxwell!' cried Caroline, who was becoming impatient.

'Perhaps we'll not need one,' replied her husband. 'See, he's coming round!'

Chartres began to move uneasily; the

blood dawned in his cheeks; and his breathing grew more vigorous. He opened his eyes and attempted to raise his head; but a twinge of pain forced a groan from him, and he again fainted.

‘We must get him into bed, in the first place,’ said Lee.

With much difficulty this was accomplished. Then Caroline renewed her demand for a doctor; but her husband, professing to have some skill in medicine, declared himself able to treat Chartres, who seemed to have fallen on the top of his head. Cold water, he assured his wife, would soon remove the effects of the concussion. Briscoe also said that there was no need for a doctor. Mrs Lee did not feel called on to dispute the point; and was about to resume the cold applications, when it struck her, for the first, how very extraordinary a thing it was that this stranger should be in their house.

‘Why is he here?’ she cried. ‘What are you going to do with him?’

‘We are going to make use of him in

our story, my dear,' said Lee, mildly. 'We will not do him any harm, but we may keep him prisoner here for a little.'

'How cruel! Besides, it would be a crime,' remonstrated his wife.

Lee answered very calmly, but with a consuming fire in his eyes,—

'We'll not be cruel if we can possibly help it; and, as for its being criminal, surely no novel is complete without a crime. At the start of this new departure in the art of fiction we will be much hampered in its exercise by scruples and fears of this kind. Some of us may even require to be martyrs. For example: should it be necessary in the course of the story to commit a forgery or a murder, it is not to be expected that the world will allow the crime to pass unpunished. But once the veracity and nobility, the magnanimity and self-sacrifice, which shall characterise this art and the professors of it, have raised the tone of the world, we shall be granted, I doubt not, the most cordial permission to execute atrocities, which, committed selfishly, would

brand the criminal as an unnatural monster, but which, performed for art's sake, will rebound everlastingly to the credit of the artist.'

Mrs Lee looked helplessly at her brother, who whispered to her, 'Leave him to me. I'll make it all right.'

The two men then returned to the parlour, leaving Caroline to wait on Chartres.

Briscoe having cooled down, began to examine the possibilities of good and evil which might spring to himself from his dealing with Chartres. Entered on impulsively as little more than a practical joke; achieved so far with an apparent absolute success—a success which he now felt to be the most remarkable thing about it—this adventure, as he now viewed it, opened up a field for his enterprise which might produce wheat or tares according to his husbandry. He lit a pipe, stretched himself on the sofa, and, closing his eyes, concentrated his thoughts on the remarkable incident which he had brought about.

Lee, whose presence Briscoe had ignored

began to pace the room the moment his brother-in-law's eyes were shut. The stealthy, cat-like glance which he threw at Briscoe expanded to a blaze of triumph as, in one of his turns across the floor, he seized both portmanteaus, and without accelerating his pace, walked into the unoccupied bedroom, the door of which he locked as softly as he could. Being relieved by Lee's withdrawal, Briscoe gave himself a shake on the sofa, and proceeded with his cogitation.

In the meantime Chartes had revived again. He was unable to use his tongue, but signed by opening his mouth that he wished to eat and drink. He nibbled a little toast and drank some water. He then surveyed the room and his nurse with close attention, and twice attempted to speak ; but, failing to produce any other sound than a sigh, he turned his face to the wall and fell asleep.

Caroline went at once to the parlour, where, of course, she found her brother alone.

' Peter,' she said, ' what do you wish to do with this poor man ? '



Briscoe uttered an exclamation of irritation and sat up to reply.

‘What should we do with him?’ he snarled crustily. ‘Nothing, I suppose. Send him—Where the devil are the portmanteaus?’

‘And where’s Maxwell?’

Briscoe was in the lobby immediately.

‘Here’s his hat!’ he cried. ‘He’s not gone off.’

Before he had time to try the door of the room into which Lee had shut himself, it opened, and that gentleman came forth. He was scented, gloved, and dressed in a black, broadcloth suit, which had evidently never been worn before. He smiled to his brother-in-law, kissed his wife, and stepped jauntily into the parlour. They followed, amazed and silent.

‘I am Henry Chartres,’ he said, drawing a handful of bank-notes from a bulky purse and offering them to Caroline. Briscoe snatched them eagerly, and stowed them in his breast-pocket. At that moment the door-bell rang with a violent peal that paralysed the three. A visit at any moment was an

unusual thing in their household ; but Caroline, as she went to open the door, experienced a greater perturbation than she knew how to account for ; and her feeling of dread was not lessened when the cabman, who had helped her brother to carry Chartres upstairs, and two policemen entered without ceremony. They walked past her into the parlour.

‘ Well, constable,’ said Lee, addressing the foremost of the two officers, ‘ what’s the matter ? ’

The constable turned to the cabman, and the cabman looked bewildered. When in the house before he had noticed the striking similarity between Lee and Chartres, and also the great apparent disparity between the social condition of his fare and that of the latter’s professed relation. On returning to his stand, he communicated his doubts to the policemen who had been present at the accident. These two sapient Highlanders, after considerable discussion, concluded to call at the house to which the cabman had driven, and, if they found nothing suspicious, excuse their visit in any

way suggested. The imaginations of the three had behaved in a felonious manner on the road. Peyton Street had certainly not the cleanest of reputations; and the cabman had got the length of arresting Briscoe's hand in the act of chopping up Chartres's left leg—being the last entire member of his body—when he met the man himself, as he supposed, smiling and as fresh as a daisy.

'We came to see how you were, sir,' said one of the policemen at last.

'Oh, I'm all right now,' said Lee, putting his hand in his pocket. 'I believe you assisted me when I fell. I'll see you downstairs,' with a nod which the constables understood as it was meant. 'I want you,' he said to the cabman, 'to drive me to St Enoch Station. You'll get my portmanteaus here,' leading him to the bedroom in which he had changed his dress and name.

'Good-bye, Carry. Good-bye, Peter,' and before his wife and brother-in-law had recovered from their surprise, he was rattling away to the station.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SUITOR AND THE SUED

MISS JANE CHARTRES was a most emphatic talker, because she believed everything she said. Not that she always knew beforehand that what she might be going to say was true; but as soon as she found herself saying anything she believed it firmly from the moment of its announcement. If free-thinking people ever ventured to express a doubt that she might have been misinformed, she gave them her authorities. As the number of witnesses to Miss Jane's word was much too great to admit of their being named separately, she quoted them in the lump, and would silence at once the loudest infidel with a superemphatic, 'Everybody says so,' or 'Everybody does it.'

Miss Jane, being so well acquainted with

the sayings and doings of everybody, had been forced to the belief, without knowing French, and with the inconsistency of genius, that everybody was a fool. She did not publish this dogma from the house-tops, but she did most sincerely believe it. About the time that she saw her way clearly to believe in the foolishness of everybody, another faith began to dawn upon her—a faith that she was the only individual in the world who was not a fool. It should hardly be called a faith either; for it never assumed the brightness and consistency of belief, but remained in an uncertain, nebulous condition, perhaps because she never really set herself to examine into the truth of the matter, allowing a sort of flickering halo of infallibility to play about the picture of herself which she beheld in her own mind.

Although she believed that it behoved everybody else, male and female, being fools, to marry, she had come to the conclusion that it behoved her, being in a

measure a wise woman, to remain single. This opinion, like all her other opinions—her constant opinions, that is—had been of gradual growth. It was generally supposed that it had fairly taken root about her thirtieth year, when a certain lawyer, who had been a great friend presumably of her brother, discontinued his visits to Snell House, and took to wife the wealthy widow of a game-dealer. It was understood that time had made four prior attempts with the help of a mill-owner, a wealthy farmer, a minister, and a retired colonel, to dibble this opinion with regard to herself and marriage into the soil of Miss Jane's mind. On the marriage of the lawyer with the game-dealer's widow, time made a furious stab with his persevering instrument, and the hardy opinion took a strong hold, and grew, and flourished, and put forth a flower. The opinion was that she ought not to marry; the flower, that she was made for a higher end than to be the wife of any man. The fragrance of this flower was

grateful to her. However, she never forget that it was only the blossom of an opinion, liable to be uprooted, and not the sculptured ornament of an impossible-to-be-disestablished faith.

At the time when our story begins—the middle of July 1880—Miss Jane had been absolute mistress of Snell House for three months, her brother William, a bachelor, with whom she had lived for a number of years, having died suddenly in the spring. A stroke of apoplexy had overtaken him while walking alone, as his habit was, on the shore road. His brother, Henry Chartres, was in India at the time, having gone out when a young man to push his fortune. Within five years he had secured by his own energy, and with some monetary help from his brother, a partnership in a lucrative business. He then married a lady of some means, who brought him only one child, a daughter, called Muriel, after her mother. As is the custom, the girl was brought to the home-country to be educated, her father

taking a six months' holiday for the purpose of seeing her safely installed in his brother's house, where she was to remain for some time, in order to become acclimatised, before going to her first boarding-school, and also that she might not feel so sorely her separation from her father and mother, as she would have done had she gone at once among strangers. Shortly after the return of Henry Chartres to India his wife died. He at once determined to give up business and return to Scotland, where the society of his daughter and relatives would console him for the loss of his wife. But a crisis in the affairs of the Calcutta house of which he was a principal kept him in India. His foresight and resource were absolutely necessary for the weathering of the storm; and he found the relief, which he had been about to seek in Scotland, in an unreserved devotion to business. When he had re-established the credit of his firm more securely than ever, it became apparent that, were he to retire, the



consequences might be disastrous for his partners, as his name had come to be synonymous with stability. It was, therefore, not until ten years after the death of his wife that he felt himself at liberty to give up business. The news of his brother's death arrived just as he had begun to arrange his affairs. In reply to a telegram from his sister, he bade her expect him in July; and announced in his first letter that he would manage to reach Scotland about the middle of the month.

The lands of Snell consist of a bit of moor and a park. They had been bought in the beginning of last century by the first notable member of the west country Chartreses, a branch of an old Perthshire family. Miss Jane Chartres refused altogether to admit that she knew anything of the derivation of her ancestor's wealth; and we, therefore, think it needless to refer further to the subject. The wall which bounded Snell Park on the north stood about fifty yards from the edge of a moderately high cliff overlook-

ing the Firth of Clyde. The top of this wall was four feet from the ground within the park, and a little over six feet above the road without. The road was private, and scarcely better than a footpath.

For three months, then, Miss Jane Chartres, whose character has been indicated above, whose age is left to the reader's charity, had exercised despotic power over Snell House, moor, park, and north wall. But liberties had been taken with that wall, and with an old tree that grew against it. The reader shall hear the history of these dreadful doings from Miss Jane's own lips. She was there, beside the tree, on the afternoon of July 15; and, with her, her friend, Mr Alec Dempster, a very wealthy youth of thirty, with no past — the brother of Emily Dempster, Miss Jane's one bosom friend, whose place in her affections, vacant by death, he supplied in a sort of interim capacity as well as a man with no past, and no possibility of ever having one, could be expected to do.

‘Well, Mr Dempster,’ said Miss Jane, ‘aren’t you dying with wonder to know why I’ve brought you here?’

‘Dying?’ said Mr Dempster, whose voice was a reminiscence of some mechanical sound, one couldn’t exactly say which; ‘dying is such a strong expression that it almost—eh—ah—expresses the degree of my wonder.’

Mr Dempster moved his head spirally, slowly and regularly from the top to the bottom of something, as he spoke. That was the great peculiarity of Mr Dempster: he was like something. Everything about him, from his boots to his manners, bore indefinable resemblances to other things; but the moment a simile seemed securely anchored in some characteristic of his appearance or conduct, the characteristic would undulate into something so incongruous with the simile that the latter was like a pair of spectacles on a lynx. One thing only he insisted on reproducing with some degree of regularity of form: the spiral wriggle of his head—extending

occasionally into his body—which always accompanied the effort to speak, and sometimes occurred alone.

‘Read that,’ said Miss Jane, handing Mr Dempster a letter.

Mr Dempster, mildly astonished, and looking like something very foolish, did as he was directed.

‘MY DARLING FRANK,—Meet me to-morrow at five, at the low wall. It’s half-past ten, and I am very sleepy. I’ve been reading history to aunt since eight. I am beginning to dream already, before I am asleep. It’s a happy dream—about you! It will become bright and plain when I get to sleep. Good-night, sweetheart.—  
Your own MURIEL.’

‘What do you think of that?’ snapped Miss Jane; and Mr Dempster looked in all directions hurriedly, as if a whip had been cracked about his ears.

‘It’s—it’s very frank,’ he said.

‘Very,’ went on Miss Jane. ‘Look at that.’

She pointed to the bole of the huge elm beneath whose boughs they were standing, indicating a little space denuded of the ivy which covered the rest of the trunk, and extended along the four great arms, and up among the smaller branches of the tree.

Mr Dempster bored his nose into the uncovered bark, studied it from several points of view, bending and curveting and bridling with as much ado as if he had been an antiquary in presence of a newly-discovered inscription.

““M C, F H,”” he said at length; ‘inside a heart—very pretty and—ah—suggestive; but—commonplace.

Mr Dempster’s pauses, however arbitrary, were impressive.

‘Do you know whose these initials are?’ Miss Jane asked.

‘I haven’t the remotest idea.’

““M C,” Muriel Chartres; “F H,” Frank Hay.’

‘Ah!’

Dempster leant against an arm of the

tree and regarded Miss Jane blankly. He had arrived from Edinburgh that day at her summons, to meet Mr Chartres, who was expected in the afternoon, and to prosecute his suit for the hand of Muriel. This was a dash of cold water right in his face. He hadn't a word to say, and scarcely any breath to say one.

'You know Mr Hay,' Miss Jane said. 'You remember, William used to patronise him.'

'The foundling! Why, the fellow hasn't a penny!' exclaimed Dempster.

'Ah, Mr Dempster,' said Miss Jane, more sweetly than her wont, 'presumption is poverty's next door neighbour. Wealth and modesty often go hand in hand.'

Dempster at once applied this aphoristic compliment to himself, as he was intended to do; but he horrified Miss Jane by bowing emphatically in acknowledgment, and he outraged her further by endeavouring to pay her back in kind:—

'A thorough acquaintance with the world generally accompanies the single life.'

That was his period, and he imagined he had acquitted himself fairly well. But dissatisfaction lowered in Miss Jane's brow. He proceeded with stammering haste to mend matters :—

‘Especially the single female—eh—ah—’

An angry flush drew him up. Still, he went at it again headlong, smiling too, and in as suave a tone as he could command :—

‘Wisdom is an old maid—I mean—Minerva was unmarried.’

Everybody knows people like Mr Dempster. We are accustomed to their shifting similitudes, their inability to express themselves, their pretensions, and their good nature. In fact, we do not regard them—we do not recognise that they are peculiar ; and when we see one of them singled out and reproduced—on the stage, for example—however faithfully, we call it caricature. Miss Jane had a very narrow circle of acquaintances. The Chatreses, indeed, were all proud originals. For several generations they had mingled little in society,

preferring to retain their angularities of character in all the ruggedness of nature, rather than submit to the painful process of grinding on the social wheel, by which jagged, dull-veined flints are smoothed and polished. Miss Jane could not tolerate ordinary people. Dempster was the only commonplace character in whom she had any interest. His visits to Snell House had been hitherto few and short, and she had never got accustomed to his genial stupidity. Ineptitude with Miss Jane was an almost unpardonable offence. She remembered, however, in the confusion to which he had reduced her, much necessity in the past for self-denial and long-suffering on his account, and, having a real regard for him, she calmed her troubled soul, saying to herself, 'He means well.' And then aloud:—

'Now, Mr Dempster, this is the low wall Muriel speaks of. This letter I found here.'

She pushed aside some large ivy leaves in one of the forks of the elm, and de-

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posited the letter in a deep, natural crevice—the bottom of which was quite invisible, although easily reached by the hand.

‘How did you know to search there?’ asked Dempster.

‘Because I knew Muriel was in love.’

‘Did she tell you?’

‘No, no; this was the way of it.’

Miss Jane was in her element. She leant against the bole of the tree and folded her arms across her belt.

‘I observed that she had acquired a habit of going about with her eyebrows absurdly elevated, with a languishing look in her eyes, and with her lips just touching each other; but evidently ready at a moment’s notice to open and sigh, or to compress and kiss. I knew very well what these signs meant in a girl of her age. Just raise your eyebrows, Mr Dempster.’

Mr Dempster raised his eyebrows.

‘No, no! not to the extent of expressing astonishment, but in this way. See.’

Miss Jane suited the action to the word.

‘When you raise your eyebrows that way

your eyes can't help a languishing expression. Then this is the way her mouth was.'

Miss Jane made a *moue*.

'If you don't care to do it before me, do it when you are alone, and you will find that raising your eyebrows and looking at nothing, and preparing the lips to open, will produce in you a relaxed, sentimental, self-pitying kind of feeling, which is pretty like what romantic girls feel when they are in love. Of course, in Muriel's case it was the feeling which produced the expression, and not the expression the feeling; but I know very well that an assumption of the expression can produce the feeling, and that it always conveys the idea of that feeling to those who see it. It's the same with all feelings.'

The whole man Dempster had listened to this exposition, and burst out earnestly, 'Miss Chartres, your experience amazes me! Your observation is that of a keen—eh—ah—observer; and your discernment is truly marvellous!'

He always tried to talk in newspaper paragraphs, but his efforts were seldom attended with the success they merited.

Miss Jane shrugged her shoulders and continued: 'My suspicions were confirmed yesterday. I followed her here and secured this letter. I thought it right that you, as a suitor for Muriel's hand, favoured by me, and doubtless to be favoured by her father, should be informed of the matter.'

'You overpower me with kindness,' blurted Dempster. 'And you'll stand by me, Miss Chartres? You'll be my go-between—I mean my bulwark, my bottle-holder?' He was full of imagery, but he qualified it, saying plaintively: 'I can't express myself lucidly and vividly like you; but everybody knows I mean well.'

'I think we understand each other, Mr Dempster,' said Miss Jane, looking at her watch. 'A quarter to five. We'd better go. Muriel will be here immediately. Of course, I haven't told her that I have discovered this clandestine correspondence. I shall put the matter into her father's hands

this very day, and leave him to deal with her.'

Dempster assented to this as a wise proceeding. 'It would hardly do to watch the meeting here, I suppose—that is, if there is a meeting,' he said, as they left the wall.

'To play the spy, Mr Dempster! No, not that.'

The ivy-clad elm in which Miss Jane had found Muriel's letter, and in which she now left it forgetfully, was believed by the school-boys to mark the burial-place of a Roman general. It certainly looked as if it might be fourteen hundred years old, or even as old as the Christian era. It was a worthy peer of the Mongewell, Chipstead, and Spratborough elms, by the hoary roughness of its bark, where that could be seen, by its portly waist, and wide-spread arms drooping gracefully to the ground, by its magnificent cone of foliage, and its fathomless depth of green. How pleasant Muriel found it to stand under, to lean against, to delight her eyes with its shapeliness, and

bathe her sight in its ocean of colour! And then, with all its old-world dignity, how tender it was! How safe in its arms she felt! She could think and dream there like Nature herself, conscious and glad that the elm knew all about it. When she forced her way among the drooping boughs up to the mighty bole, she was sure that the tree thrilled with happiness, and she heard it murmuring—murmuring under its spicy breath. No wonder she made it her trysting-tree!

As soon as Miss Jane and Dempster returned to the house, Muriel, who had been lying on the lawn pretending to read a newspaper, arose, and, still apparently engrossed by the news, took a circuitous route to the elm. When she got beyond the range of prying eyes, the deceptive newspaper was folded, and, carrying it in one hand behind her, and in the other, swinging by the strings, her garden-hat, she sped along, fearful lest Frank should have to wait. Half over the wall she stretched herself, and looked up and down the road. She was first.

She leant against the tree and gazed before her. She felt perfectly happy. He was sure to come; and that was the horizon—the end of the world. There was nothing beyond the little quarter of an hour that was dawning like a new era. She would hardly be so happy when he, the sun of it, came to kiss her.

Now she looked out through the screen of leaves, softening the light upon their scabrous cheeks, and showering it like dew from their downy breasts, and saw, latticed by the wiry, corky branches and bright, brown callow twigs, the violet Firth, smooth, velvety, the pasture of white gulls, whose cries come faintly up; glimpses of the opposite shore, with the sparkling houses of the summer towns; the lordly sweep of the entrance to Loch Long; the purple misty crowns of the Cobbler and Ben Donich; and the sky; and a shadow—

‘Frank!’

‘How glad I am to find you here!’ he said. ‘I was foolish enough to fear you mightn’t come.’

‘Why did you doubt? I never missed meeting you yet.’

‘Then you expected me! I was sure at the bottom of my heart that you would be here.’

‘Did I expect you. What are you thinking of? There’s something the matter. How could you possibly be afraid that I mightn’t come after I had asked you to meet me?’

But you didn’t ask me.’

‘Oh! Did you not get my message?’

‘No; and I visited our letter-box last night and this morning.’

She tore her arm from his, and plunged her hand into the fork of the tree. A shock passed through her as she felt her letter. She knew in a moment it had been violated. The thought that another than he for whom it was intended had read it thrilled her with an exquisite pang. Her whole face and neck flushed crimson. She drew out the paper, crushed it small, and thrust it into her pocket.

‘The mean, shameful spy!’ she hissed.

Youth has no mercy in a case of this kind.

‘See,’ she continued, panting, ‘I put it here this morning at eight. It was gone at ten. Now it is here again. The traitor!’

‘Is it a man?’ asked Frank.

‘No! It’s—’

She had grown pale, and she blushed again. She looked at him with flickering eyelids. The foolish fellow’s pride in Muriel at that moment made him heart-sick; the lump was in his throat, and, had he been unobserved, the moisture which stood in his eyes would have overflowed. Even in the first wild anger at betrayal she would not betray again. He placed his arm about her and she sobbed; one sob, and then one tear out of each eye; and with that she mastered herself.

‘Frank,’ she said, as if the discovery had not been made, ‘you know my father will be here to-day. He may have come while I’ve been talking to you. Will you speak to him to-night? I don’t want to have a secret



from him. Will you? You needn't be frightened. I haven't seen him since I was nine; but I know that he's like you, gentle and manly—just a gentleman. Make up your mind now—quick, quick, quick! And let me away, or I'll be late for dinner.'

And so it was arranged that they should see each other at the low-walk again at eight that evening, lest there should be any reason why Frank might not speak at once to Mr Chartres.

## CHAPTER III

### ON THE ROAD

LEE secured a compartment for himself in the Greenock train. He had a large bundle of letters, taken from one of Chartres's portmanteaus, with him. These he studied with an intensity which he had never bestowed on anything before. He selected some dozen for perusal, and was still devouring them when the train arrived at Princes Pier.

As he stepped on the platform he reeled and was only saved from falling by the porter who opened the door of the compartment in which he had travelled. This weakness was the result of the strain of the last two hours. He fortified himself with a glass of brandy and a sandwich, deposited the portmanteaus

in the left-luggage office ; and started to walk to Gourrock.

He was a tall man, with more than proportionate length of limb. Walking had always been his favourite exercise, and he looked along the Greenock esplanade from the summit of the approach to the station with a shining eye. All the world has admired it from the deck of the *Columba* ; but to walk along it at a good spanking pace, feeling its costly breadth, its substantiality, its triumph over nature ; to be conscious of the solid nineteenth-century comfort and luxury that line one side of it, ascending the hill to larger villas and more spacious grounds ; and to be, as Lee became, before he was two minutes on the road, part and parcel of the sky-blue lake-like firth, whose water murmured, for the tide was full, with soft reproach against the curbing bastion ; of the shining magical houses on the other side ; of the green and golden shoreward slopes ; of the depths and heights of the purple mountains that met the sky—to be drunk with the sunlight and the sea, with the merging, glowing,

fading wealth of colour, and the far-reaching romance of the hills, is to enjoy to the full this west-country esplanade.

When he arrived at the end of it, Lee, unable to endure the ordinary road, jumped on a car and took a seat on the top.

He was now in a mood to dare anything, and continued his revel in the splendid July afternoon, for the brain-sick man was a poet.

Through Gourock and Ashton the car rattled, but, wrapped in his own dream, he saw nothing of them.

From the terminus he walked confidently along the shore road. He felt that he would know Snell House the moment he beheld it. Then there would be no difficulty. Chartres could not be expected to remember any of the domestics; besides, in ten years it was more than likely that they had all been changed twice over. His sister and daughter—he could not possibly mistake them. He would be shy a little, undemonstrative, uncommunicative, and plead his long journey—for Chartres had travelled from London on

the preceding night—as an excuse for retiring early. Then—

A sudden slap on the shoulder interrupted his reverie, and, wheeling round, he confronted Briscoe, on whose face a bitter sneer was varnished over with a grin at the surprise and annoyance his appearance caused his brother-in-law.

‘This way,’ said Briscoe; and Lee followed him in silence.

They found a seat, one of a number placed along the shore between the Cloch and Ashton. There was a considerable slope from the road to the water’s edge; and they were securely concealed from the eyes of pedestrians by the trees and bushes that line stretches of the seaboard.

It never entered Lee’s head to ask Briscoe how he came to be there. Had he done so, Briscoe would have told him—that is, if he had thought the truth expedient—how Caroline and he, after Lee’s sudden and daring departure from Peyton Street, judged it the best course to intercept him at the St Enoch station; but how he, Briscoe, having

already in his breast-pocket some of the advantages arising from Lee's deception, determined, if possible, to add to them, and so journeyed to Greenock in the same train with his brother-in-law ; and, pushing on before him, waited for him at a quiet part of the road, where they might discuss the situation without much fear of interruption or observation. He had not the remotest intention of aiding Lee, whom he despised, to pursue his deception to a successful issue. On the contrary, he intended to line his own pockets as thickly as he could, and get off to London that night or the following morning. There was one risk : Chartres might recover sufficiently to come down to Snell House before he had gone. This risk he determined to run.

'I wish,' said Lee, recovering speedily from his surprise, 'you had not come down yet. I have been thinking of you and Caroline, and don't exactly see what to do with you.'

His infatuation was such that he had no doubt Briscoe intended to collaborate with him.

'I might marry you,' he continued, 'to my daughter Muriel; or, as she is perhaps too young, to my mature sister, Jane. But what to do with Caroline? You see, I didn't marry again in India. The only course I can conceive at present, will be to make her acquaintance as it were for the first time, and marry her over again. But there's no hurry; and, I think, on the whole, you had better return to Glasgow until I prepare matters for you down here.'

'Mr Chartres,' said Briscoe, 'am I to collaborate with you, or am I not?'

Lee flushed with pleasure, and answered, 'Most certainly, my dear Peter!'

'Then I must have some share in devising the plot.'

'Assuredly! I beg your pardon. I was forgetting your rights. Really, I have been selfish in the solitary enjoyment of the creation of this novel, which you began with such originality and power.'

Briscoe rather winced at this. However, he was glad to find Lee so tractable.

'Mr Chartres,' he said, 'I am your friend,

Mr Peter Briscoe. I came from India with you. I'm a rough diamond; don't care how I dress—accounts for my rather worn tog-gery; see? Saved you from drowning when you fell overboard in the Bay of Biscay. You, eternally grateful; I, no friends in this country—across for a visit merely—came right north with you, agreeing to do so at the last moment, so that you had no time to advise them at Snell House.'

Lee gazed at his brother-in-law with admiration.

'Briscoe, my dear fellow,' he cried, 'you're a trump! You—you saved my life.'

'Then we'll take the road again,' said Briscoe. 'The house is round the corner; I inquired shortly before you came up.'

'Briscoe,' said Lee, 'for the first work of a newly-born art, we are—'

'Beating the record.'

'Exactly, my rough and ready friend.'



## CHAPTER IV

### A HEAVY FATHER

‘Now, Jane, let me understand this about Muriel. You say she is at present engaged in a grand love affair with some young hopeful or other.’

‘Yes, Henry. Frank Hay is a very good-looking, clever, well-behaved young man. He has taken one of the big bursaries in Glasgow University, and looks forward to a professorship somewhere. These prospects are rather mediocre, especially in connection with a Chartres; but neither William nor I would have said a word against him were he not a foundling.’

‘A foundling! How very interesting! An actual foundling.’

‘Oh, there’s nothing unusual about his case. I forget the exact details, but they

differ in no essential from what we are accustomed to in stories.'

'That's rather unfortunate. I should have liked everything connected with these events to have the same characteristic as the main circumstance—distinct novelty.'

'What do you mean, Henry? Muriel is right in thinking you curiously changed.'

'Does she think so? Well; I should have stuck by my original determination, and gone to bed; but I felt so invigorated after dinner, that I thought we might as well have a talk over matters this evening.'

'Yes,' said Miss Jane, dryly, prodding Lee all over with her piercing eyes.

'Do you think,' she queried, 'we did right in forbidding Muriel to have any communication with Mr Hay?'

'Well, my dear sister, you must see that the question of right hardly enters here. It is purely a matter of adapting means to an end. Should the course you have followed, as in the case of a pair of high-spirited lovers, be calculated to lead to strained relations, and produce, say, an elopement, I

should be inclined to support you ; as, although shorn of much of its romance in these days of railways and telegraphs, there is always a measure of excitement to be got out of a runaway match.'

Miss Jane meditated for several seconds ; and hopefully came to the conclusion that her brother had developed a satirical tendency, which he gratified in this recondite fashion. She made no reply. Lee resumed.

'I think you had better send Muriel to me. I would like to have a talk with her alone.'

'Very well,' said Miss Jane, curtly, and left the room.

It was the library in which Lee sat. He had arrived with Briscoe about six o'clock, just as the Snell household were sitting down to dinner. Four was the usual dinner hour, but it had been put off till five and then till six—to the anger and horror of the cook—in the hope that Mr Chartres would be there to preside. Both Lee and Briscoe imagined that the dinner had gone off to

admiration. The latter, taking advantage of his rollicking character, was now roving about the rooms, helping himself to many little valuables. After securing all the money Lee was possessed of, which he might manage to do that evening, he saw a fair chance of getting away with his booty, out of immediate danger, and before the arrival of Chartres, whom he half-expected to find in every room he entered. He knew that Caroline would not wait for his return if her charge recovered sufficiently to travel, but would start with him at once; and while she might be able to make terms for her crazy husband, some stout men-servants and a duck-pond suggested anything but a pleasant ending to his own share in the adventure. After Miss Jane had left the library, Lee, with a most placid expression, walked across the room once or twice, and sat down to wait for Muriel. In a second or two the door opened, and Mr Dempster appeared. This gentleman had been left to himself since dinner, and was searching for Miss Jane.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' he said, looking the very picture of a square man in a round hole. 'I thought Miss Chartres was here.'

'Come in, come in, Mr Dempster,' said Lee, blandly. 'Is it my daughter or my sister you wish to see?'

'Your sister, sir.'

'I expect them both here in a few minutes. Take a seat.'

Dempster gathered his coat-tails on either side with as much tenderness and delicacy as if they had been growing out of him and were recovering from rheumatism, and sat down on the very edge of a chair, crowding himself together as if he had consisted of several people.

'I hope I don't intrude,' said Dempster, with the spiral motion of his head. He was always more uncomfortable and serpentine than usual in the presence of strangers.

'Not at all.'

Lee said to himself, 'This is a millionaire; and I am an adventurer—Fortune is a mistress of irony.'

A smile peculiar to him, and childish in

its unconcealed expression of pleasure, passed over his face. Then he said brusquely, but with perfect good humour, 'Do you think much, Mr Dempster?'

'Think!' exclaimed Mr Dempster, throwing his head back in a convulsion which a burlesque actor would have paid highly to learn the trick of.

'Yes, think,' repeated Lee, with his happy, innocent smile.

'I—I can't say I do,' said Dempster, perspiring profusely. 'I—I,' he continued, making a wholly ineffectual effort to laugh—'I—eh—ah—haven't given the subject much attention. But—'

'Exactly, Mr Dempster, I understand. I have often thought, by the way, that you unlucky fellows who inherit your money can't enjoy it so well as we who have wrought for it.'

Now, if there was one thing Dempster objected to more than another, it was to be hurried about from subject to subject. He had just got his mind focussed to the consideration of Lee's first question, when

a new distance intervened, and—he saw men as trees walking. But he must make some reply.

‘No—no,’ he said. ‘We can’t. I—I think we can’t. Eh—ah—’

‘Eh—ah,’ the favourite expletive of the orator, was frequently employed by Dempster with a solemn pathos inexpressibly touching. Lee almost relented at the overpowering sadness of its utterance on this occasion; but the baiting of a millionaire was as novel as any of his present manifold pleasures, and he continued it.

‘I suppose now,’ he said, ‘you would like to work hard at something or other. Most idle men would.’

Dempster rubbed his knees with vehemence, anxious, doubtless, to get himself into an electric condition which would enable him to overcome the insane disposition he felt to fall forward at Lee’s feet. He succeeded in producing so much of the positive fluid as to fall back instead of forward; but all he could manage to say was, ‘I suppose I would.’

'I have often wondered,' said Lee, whose smile was beginning to be warped by malice, 'why rich men don't commit burglaries and homicides in order to obtain terms of hard labour. It would be such an absolute change for them; *ennui* would hide its head.'

It is impossible to say what ultimate effect this remarkable suggestion would have had upon Dempster, for the paralysis which it caused to begin with was suddenly cured by a tap—a shrinking, single tap on the door, preceding the entrance of Muriel. Dempster took the opportunity of escaping in a thoroughly graceless manner. When the door had closed again, Lee said to Muriel, who remained standing, 'Do you not find me exactly what you expected?'

She looked hard at him. It was on her lips to tell him that she thought him very unlike his letters; but she merely said, 'You are not like your photographs.'

'No; they were generally thought good in India.'



'Oh, anyone could tell for whom they were meant.'

'Of course. My appearance has changed since I last sat to a photographer. Sit down, Muriel; I wish to have some serious conversation with you.'

Muriel sat down on a couch. Her eyes were twinkling, and the blood danced into her cheeks.

'I have learned from your aunt,' said Lee, who was just a little too portentously grave, 'that there exists a romantic attachment between a certain Mr Frank Hay and you. I understand you are firmly persuaded that you and this gentleman love each other with an unchangeable love. I will grant that Mr Hay is a handsome, high-spirited young man. I do not remember to have seen him; but I give my daughter credit for not falling in love with a booby. I admit that first love is the most ecstatically delightful thing in the world. I say, I subscribe to all that and as much more as you like in the same strain; but'—and here he became

very severe—‘I have to inform you that from this day you must cease to see, or correspond with, Mr Frank Hay.’

‘Oh father!’

Lee, enjoying his power, and as much a spectator of the scene as an actor in it, continued coldly: ‘It will be hard, I know; but your friends have acted very wisely in coming between you. Girls should never be allowed to choose husbands, and never are in well-regulated families. You may think me plain-spoken and harsh, perhaps; but I have a habit of coming to the point; and, notice, of never returning to it. The matter is settled.’

‘But, sir—’

‘What! have I not said it is settled? I do not mean, however, to do you out of a husband.’

Muriel shivered, and her face became white.

‘My friend, Mr Briscoe, who saved my life, is still a young man; and I intend to have him for a son-in-law.’

Lee’s eyes dilated with exultation. His

novel was going to turn out a masterpiece.

‘Marry Mr Briscoe!’

‘It rests with him,’ said Lee.

‘What! Your daughter must marry this Mr Briscoe if he wants her, whether she likes or not?’

‘I am glad,’ said Lee, in a truly regal style, ‘that you apprehend the matter so clearly.’

‘I am bewildered,’ said Muriel.

‘You seem to be; but it is wise of you not to object. I hope to find you always a dutiful daughter.’

Lee left the room. A timepiece on the mantel-shelf rang eight. The blood returned to Muriel’s cheeks, and she ran out of the house to the north wall.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ART OF PROPOSING

WHEN Dempster left the library on the entrance of Muriel, he met Miss Jane at the door of that room. She proposed a turn in the park as the evening was doing honour to the glorious day. They went out together and wandered to Muriel's elm. Dempster's suit was the subject they discussed. She urged him to make a proposal that night, and promised to procure him an opportunity. Dempster was willing, but in great straits how to proceed.

'You see,' he said, 'I never did a thing of the kind before. Then you know Muriel is not aware that I'm in love with her. If she knew that, then I could go at it like a—professor.'

It is to be feared he intended to say

'nigger,' and only substituted the more refined but equally enigmatic word by an exhaustive effort of brain power, whose external manifestation was the usual wriggle.

Miss Jane said, 'Well, it *is* very difficult to know what to do in making an offer of marriage. I have had six proposals—that is, former proposals—all of which I refused peremptorily, as I think that I was made for a higher end than to be the wife of any man—and they were all done differently; but, on the whole, I prefer the colonel's method; and I think in proposing to Muriel you had better follow it.'

'Oh, thank you! Tell me exactly what he did, and I'll practise it just now.'

In his excitement Dempster's body, lithe and lissom as that of the most poetical maiden, partook in the motion of his head. Miss Jane, who had often been on the point of speaking to him about this absurd habit, burst out, 'Don't wriggle that way, as if you were impaled!'

Dempster shrivelled up, and hung flaccid

on his spinal column, like a hooked worm that has been long in the water.

‘I assure you,’ continued Miss Jane, less harshly, ‘if you are ever to take a place in the world you must overcome that.’

‘Must I! I’m very glad you’ve told me. It’s my natural form.’

‘Conquer it, conquer it. Remember Demosthenes, Mr Dempster.’

‘I will, I will,’ he cried, almost breaking his back, and causing a hot shooting pain in his head, as he nipped a sprouting corkscrew in the bud—a metaphor worthy of himself. Then he made a sudden plunge into a sea of words, where he had to keep perpetually rapping on the head an electric eel that tried with unremitting fervour to run, or rather wriggle, the gauntlet of his body and escape by his skull through the suture.

‘Miss Chartres,’ he said, ‘I wish you would help me. I have been wanting to get married for six years now, and I can’t. I won’t be caught. They try it, the mothers. They dangle their daughters before me like

—like Mayflies. But I won't bite. I'd sooner starve, Miss Chartres, starve. Die in a ditch—celibacy, you know. I'll never marry one of these artificial flies. They may be good enough; but it's their mothers—Oh, their mothers! Why, I've read about them in novels. And then, when I do fall in love with a nice—with a sweet—a natural—eh—ah—a natural fly—you understand—I—I can't bite—haven't the courage—don't know how. I've been in love before several times—though I never loved anybody before like Muriel—and I couldn't possibly manage to—to bite. But you'll teach me now, my dear Miss Chartres.'

He emerged dripping, and the long-repressed eel shot out at the crown of his head in a rapid spasm, leaving him a mere husk propped against the elm.

Miss Jane, who had made up her mind that he should marry Muriel, put his sincerity against his *gaucherie*, and determined to drill him into some better form; for she judged that if the excitement of talking about a proposal produced effects of the kind she had

witnessed, that of making one would simply stultify its object.

‘I’ll help you,’ she said. ‘Stand there.’

She seated herself on a protruding root of the elm, and pointed to a sort of alcove in one of the large boughs. Dempster squeezed himself under the branches, and stood, or rather stooped, at attention.

‘Now, obey my instructions. Imagine this to be a drawing-room. Come forward on tip-toe, and say very significantly, and in fact intensely, “Good evening, Miss Chartres,” and don’t wriggle.’

Dempster, clothed with resolution as with a strait-jacket, advanced and whispered between his set teeth, ‘Good evening Miss Chartres.’

‘Good evening, Mr Dempster ; be seated.’

He looked about for as comfortable a knot as possible, but Miss Jane cried, ‘No, no ! you must refuse respectfully. The gallant colonel did. He said something like this :—  
“Miss Chartres, I will never sit in your presence until I have got an answer to a question which my whole being is burning



to ask." When you have said that, go down on one knee and take my hand.

Dempster was beginning to feel at home, Miss Jane was so sympathetic, and smiled so benignly. In the heat of the moment, and to prove himself an apt scholar, he thought he would reproduce his lesson with variations. So he got down on his knees at the off-set, and began, 'My adored Miss Chartres, never again in your enchanting presence—'

'Oh!' went off among the branches like a sharp tap on a muffled drum.

Miss Jane looked up in time to catch a glimpse of Muriel's head. Dempster's strait-jacket snapped, and the released mechanism hoisted him to his feet, spinning and glaring round in a vortex of coat-tails.

Miss Jane, also on her feet, said calmly, 'That was Muriel. There's no harm done. I must just tell her the exact state of the case. It's always best to tell the truth. If she has any heart at all it will be touched at the thought of your rehearsing your proposal. I'll go after her, and explain, and

send her to you. That's the very thing.'

Now, Miss Jane was a very shrewd woman. Her mind had been ingenuously fixed on a marriage between her niece and her *protégé* up to the moment of the appearance of Muriel's head among the branches. There and then a sense of the incongruity of such a union had struck her with most convincing power. Several forces converged in this blow. One can be mentioned unreservedly, viz., the sudden intuitive recognition of the fact that Muriel would never consent to marry Dempster. Another, equally powerful, must only be hinted:—the lady at that moment had once more, however strangely, a gentleman at her feet. These are the keys to her future conduct.

She was about to go after Muriel, but Dempster clutched her dress.

'I can't,' he whimpered.

'Nonsense. You'll be astonished at your own courage.'

'But the proposal. How am I to say it?'

‘Keep a good heart, and remember my instructions. I’ve told you how to begin. The rest you must do for yourself. Muriel will be here shortly.’

Dempster resigned himself, and in a few seconds fear wound him up to a pitch of nervous excitement, abnormal even with him.

‘I’ll rehearse again,’ he said aloud, withdrawing to the alcove. He got into the strait-jacket once more, and advanced on tip-toe to an imaginary lady. But the charge did not give him satisfaction. He retreated and stepped out a second time. He was too absorbed in his manœuvres to remember that, however perfect he might become, this mode would be out of the question in the impending interview.

‘Good evening,’ he said impressively to the mossy root, and got down on his knees.

‘Miss Chartres’—and persuasion tipped his tongue—‘I am burning to know—’

A silvery ripple glided through the air behind him. ‘I beg pardon, Mr Dempster.

I was not aware you were so pious a man,' said Muriel.

A jack-in-the-box when the spring is touched shoots up not more suddenly than Dempster did. Abashed, he could only stammer, 'Eh—ah—I mean well.'

'I do indeed believe you,' said Muriel, in a kindly tone. 'My aunt has told me that you were about to honour me with an offer of marriage. I thank you, sir; but I beg you not to put me to the necessity—the very disagreeable necessity -- of refusing you.'

Half-an-hour before she could not have taken such a plain-spoken initiative; but the interview with Lee had roused her soul to arms.

Dempster, on the contrary, dimly conscious of his own absurdity and afraid to trust his nature, stood forth against her in his strait-waistcoat of formality. He could hardly believe his ears, accustomed to the lie that no girl could possibly refuse a millionaire, a false tenet which he had donned with his first pair of trousers.

‘Why should you refuse me? I—I am very rich, and I love you.’ This was still pronounced in his best society tone.

‘I am very sorry for you,’ said Muriel, frigidly. ‘If you persist you will only annoy us both.’

His fear suddenly left him. He felt an underhand attack upon his wealth, which was *him*—his personality. He threw off the strait-waistcoat. He turned up the sleeves of his riches, and in a raucous tone like that of an aggrieved school bully who wants an excuse to pommel a small boy, said, ‘Why do you refuse me? Give me a reason.’

‘A reason!’

‘Yes. Is there anything extraordinary in asking for a reason? I can’t be put off in this way, you know. Do you love another?’

‘I am very sorry for you; but you are becoming impertinent.’

‘But what am I to do if you won’t marry me? All my friends know what I’ve come here for. It’s absurd.’

‘You had better desist.’

It is charitable to suppose that Dempster was utterly unaware of what he was doing. Anger nearly suffocated him. He twisted and squirmed at every word, writhing with the anticipation of mockery.

‘It’s shameful,’ he cried. ‘Here have I been loving you like—like lava; and to be thrown overboard, ignominiously—yes, ignominiously’—he fancied he heard the word resounding in smoking-rooms—‘for a poor nobody.’

Muriel started and glared at him. But he was ‘fey,’ and went on.

‘You may well look! A foundling—a charity-boy! You love this sup—superfluous and probably illegitimate pauper, who—’

‘Oh, you unmanly fool!’

‘I say!’ and he fell against the tree smitten by Muriel’s thunder and lightning. The storm pealed on.

‘I have read of men who spoke such cowardice, but I never thought to know one. How dare you talk of love? Oh, the

shame! Every wealthy fool can look at us, and love us, as they say, and whine to us—it *is* a shame! What right have you to love me or think of me? If you ever wish to be worth a thought, or fit for his service whom you've slandered, go and found hospitals, endow scholarships—fling your wealth in the sea—only get rid of it! And plough the fields, break stones, dig ditches—some honest work your scanty brains are suited for; and when that has made you something of a man, go and beg his pardon. Go away from here, now, at once. He's waiting for me.'

Dempster limped away. His works were all run down. Youth is cruel, and Muriel had meant to wound; but she felt a little remorseful at the sight of the abject creature she had scorched and scotched with such crude severity, and wished that she had at least spared him the last savage cut. To be called a fool and a coward—to be told to get rid of one's personality, is bad; but to be dismissed in order to make instant room for the other, partakes too much of

hacking and slashing, and might even be put in the category with vitriol-throwing.

Muriel looked over the wall and called Frank. He was waiting somewhere near, she knew; and he came and climbed over and kissed her.

‘Where were you hiding?’ she asked.

‘I sat on a stone by the side of the wall and meant to sit there till the voices ceased, or you called me.’

‘Did you hear what we said?’

‘No.’

‘Well, it doesn’t matter just now. I’ll tell you some other time.’

She sat down on the wall and bade him do the same. Dempster was forgotten: the stronger impression, that produced by Lee, came out through the more recent one like the original writing on a palimpsest.

‘When one meets one’s father,’ she said, ‘after a long absence, whether one knows him well or not, one’s heart leaps, and a great thrill strikes through one.’

‘Yes,’ said Frank. ‘I believe my nerves would ring to the sound of my father’s voice



if I were hearing it, though I've never seen him.'

'Don't imagine it for a moment, dear. When your father comes back after ten years you shiver in his presence—you feel as if you had jumped into a frosty sea out of the summer. I did when I went to him from you.'

She kicked her heels against the wall, and sat on her hands, looking round and up at Frank like a bird. Then she turned her gaze into the tree. In the mood that held her, to think was to resolve. She came to her feet, and stood before her lover.

'What would you think if I were to tell you that my father had chosen a husband for me?'

'I should think it the height of folly, unless I were his selection.'

'Come to him now. Say to him that you love me, and that I love you, and that he may kill me if he likes, but that I will never marry anybody else.'

'This is encouraging.'

‘And you will need courage.’

‘What is wrong?’

‘You’ll know soon enough. Come.’ And she led him to the house. She danced along the path. Her eyes clashed against his.

‘I’m in the major key,’ she said.

No wonder she was in the major key. She had a vision of the encounter between her lover and her father; a wordy tournament in which the former bore off the honours. Her heart was fast melting down every feeling into a glowing rage at the man who, after ten years’ absence, came to blight her life; and her body, the flames about that crucible, leapt and trembled. She could move only in bounds to a measure. Frank, mystified, but flushed by sympathy, followed her, admiring.

She took him straight to the library. Lee was not there.

‘Wait here, and I shall find my father,’ she said.

But Miss Jane came into the room.

‘How, in the name of all the proprieties,

dare you enter this house, sir?' she cried.

Frank, as the reader will surmise, had been forbidden the house.

Muriel sat down on the couch and pulled her lover to her side. Then she rested her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands and looked at her aunt. It was grossly impertinent.

'For shame! What is the meaning of this folly, Muriel?' and the angry lady crossed the floor, and bristled before the couple with only a yard between.

Muriel became absolutely but serenely rabid.

'Mr Hay is going to take supper with us to-night,' she said. 'Ring the bell, please, aunt, and order supper to be hastened.'

Miss Jane towered, physically and morally.

'Muriel'—she spoke solemnly, as became her exaltation—'you wicked girl! You have much greater cause to keep your room and cry over your misdemeanours, than come

here outraging all decency in this way. Have you no maidenly reserve at all?’

Then she leant towards Frank.

‘Mr Hay, I should think this exhibition of temper and impudence will make it needless to fear that you will aid further in thwarting our intentions with regard to Muriel. Indeed, I don’t know at present how it will be possible for me to stand by quietly and see any young man, however eligible, throw himself away on such an incorrigible young woman.’

Thoroughly on fire at the imperturbable smile on Muriel’s face, she leaned towards her again, a flaming tower of Pisa.

‘Muriel, if ever you wish to regain the place you have lost in my esteem, you will tell Mr Hay to leave this house at once, and never enter it again.’

Muriel fumbled in her pocket, and half withdrew her hand, but thought better of it.

Miss Jane again menaced Frank.

‘Mr Hay, the cool effrontery you display in sitting quietly smiling—don’t try to hide

it, sir!—while the woman you profess to love throws to the winds all respect for herself and her betters, actually and openly defying her aunt—'

Muriel had risen, and was approaching the bell-pull. Her hand was almost on it when her aunt, with surprising agility, intercepted her.

'Not while I live!' she cried, almost hysterically.

Frank rose and began, 'I shall not—'

'You shall,' cried Muriel

'Leave the room, Muriel!' said Miss Jane, collecting her dignity, and posing again as a tower

Muriel's hand slipped back to her pocket, and she looked straight into her aunt's eyes. Once more she changed her purpose, and left the room with a smile, and an airy nod to Frank.

'Did that girl wink just now, sir?' said Miss Jane.

'I didn't observe.'

The excited lady pulled a chair before Frank, and sat down opposite him.

‘Mr Hay,’ she said, ‘I wish to be reasonable. I know myself what it is to be young. Indeed, putting other circumstances aside, I can almost sympathise with you in your infatuation for Muriel. She is really a very good-looking girl; but this scene must have convinced you that her nature is wholly unregenerate, and I hope—’

What she hoped can only be guessed, for Muriel re-entered the room.

Miss Jane rose, this time in cathedral-like grandeur. Alas! she was a very weak-tempered woman. The cathedral brought forth a cat.

‘What brings you back?’ she cried. ‘You are a disgrace to your sex; you are no lady; you are a shameless minx!’

Muriel came close to her, her hand clutched in her pocket.

‘Aunt,’ she said, ‘you are carrying this a little too far. Did you really suppose that I had gone at your command?’

‘I certainly did; and I repeat it. Go!’

‘When I leave this room, Frank goes with me. Supper will be served in a

minute for him and me in my sitting-room.'

'Is it you or I that's dreaming, girl?'

'You have been dreaming, but you're wakening now. You thought you could mistress me; you can't.'

'If I can't mistress *you*, as you vulgarly say, we'll see whom the servants will obey.'

Miss Jane rang the bell violently.

Muriel's hand was again half out of her pocket, but a whimsical expression came over her face, and she returned it.

'They sha'n't get the chance of disobeying you,' she said, going out of the room and holding the door shut. Her aunt tried to pull it open, but did not prosecute her attempt. It was too like a schoolgirl. She appealed to Frank tacitly. He shook his head. To tell the truth, the young man enjoyed it rather than not.

Shortly, a housemaid's voice was heard saying, 'Supper's just ready, Miss Muriel.'

The answer came, 'Very well; that's all,' and Muriel re-entered. She put her back

against the door in a blaze of triumph, and said mock-heroically, 'No one shall leave this room till supper's served.'

Miss Jane was beaten, and Muriel had conquered without it; but now she held it out, and shook it open, remorselessly, her poor, little, crumpled letter. Her aunt, who had forgotten all about it, sank on the couch sobbing hysterically. Youth will exact the uttermost farthing, knowing not how it will need much mercy itself. The girl was punished there and then by a shade that passed over her lover's brow. She felt that he remembered the scene of the discovery, and contrasted it with this; but before she had decided what amends to make, Lee entered the room. He looked about him, and immediately appeared to be in a tremendous passion; Miss Jane sat up, and Muriel, crossing the floor, took Frank's arm.'

'Muriel,' said Lee, 'go to your room.'

She clung to Frank.

'I never bid twice,' and he pulled her away, and swung her to the door.



‘This is too much!’ cried Frank, stepping towards Lee.

‘Mr Hay, I suppose. I shall speak with you immediately.’

Muriel was about to approach Frank again, but Lee pointed her sternly to the door. As before, in his presence, and by his conduct, she was utterly bewildered, and wandered out of the room as if she had lost her wits.

‘Here’s a change!’ exclaimed Miss Jane. ‘What a disgraceful scene there has been here, brother! I apologise to myself for allowing my emotions to overcome me.’

‘Leave us, please, Jane.’

‘Certainly, Henry,’ and as she went, she cast a withering look at Frank.

## CHAPTER VI

### LEE ENJOYS HIMSELF

LEE sat down behind the table and began to point a quill. Frank took a chair opposite him.

'Mr Hay,' said Lee, 'we may as well come to the point at once. My daughter cannot marry you. I have chosen her a husband.'

'I am glad to come to the point at once,' said Frank. 'Miss Chartres bade me tell you that she will have no husband but me. She sends you this message: You may kill her, but you cannot force her to marry against her will.'

'I am sorry her message is so commonplace. It indicates that her novel-reading has not been eclectic, to say the least; and, which is of more importance to me, it lowers

the tone of the present work. That, of course, you don't understand; but no matter. Force her to marry against her will? Surely not. *You* know, if *she* doesn't, that people never act against their wills. We will change her will, or kill it.'

'Which would be to kill her.'

'I'm not so sure of that. It will be an interesting experiment. I understand you to say that by the time my daughter's will has been conquered, her body must be so reduced that death will ensue. Now, I do not think so. What will you wager that she does not survive the subjugation of her will?'

There was a pause before Frank replied, which gave his answer an appearance of deliberation it did not possess. He was so astonished at the beaming satisfaction on Lee's face, utterly incompatible under any hypothesis he could think of, with the cold-blooded, heartless suggestion regarding Muriel, that words were denied him for a second or two. When they did come, slowly and vehemently, they

had more reference to the character of the waggerer than the matter of the villainous bet.

‘You are a scoundrel!’

Lee laid down the quill with which he had been dallying, and settled himself comfortably in his chair. He expected to derive great pleasure from this interview. Hitherto he had been dealing with women and servants; he was now to have a foeman worthy of his steel.

‘I am a scoundrel,’ he said, weighing each word. ‘That is your position. Now, how will you defend it?’

The momentary blankness on Frank’s face made Lee fear he had been too precipitate, and had routed the young man with this wholly unexpected turn, putting an end to the intellectual enjoyment he had anticipated. So when the blankness left Frank’s face, the child-like happiness which dwelt in every line of Lee’s could only be matched by the pictured countenance of some rapt and smiling mediæval saint. The young man, concluding that he had to deal

with what the world calls a 'character,' met him on his own ground.

'Your imperturbability under the accusation is the best proof, I think.' He said this mildly and collectedly, not wishing to give Lee the advantage of his coolness.

'A very fair answer,' said Lee. 'I shall allow you this stroke by way of compensation. Poor fellow, you will have a sore heart for a while, I imagine. You're not a fool, and you're good-looking. I think more of my daughter on your account.'

Lee resumed the quill, and began to write with a perfect assumption of unconcern. Frank stood up, put both hands on the table, leant forward a little, and delivered himself of a short speech. His blood was up, and he spoke very little above a whisper.

'Mr Chartres, you have the right to control the actions of your daughter. You are going to abuse that right. I shall interfere. Your daughter loves me; you are going to force her from me; I shall do all I can to prevent you. I love your daughter;

I shall stick at nothing to obtain her: Mr Chartres, I shall succeed.'

The practical novelist positively trembled with delight.

'I like you, young man,' he cried; 'and I believe you will improve. I think you will be unconsciously my best collaborateur. Both your character and Muriel's will be tested, illuminated and strengthened for good or evil, in the course of this work, and that immediately. Who would write who has once tasted the pleasures of this new fiction! This is a foreign language to you. Some day I may teach you its whole secret. In the meantime, regard me as a student of character, who, tired of books, of the dead subject, has taken to vivisection—vivisection of the soul. Well, sir, it is to be a duel, then. Good. I have a suspicion you imagine it is your bold bearing that makes me so placid. You are mistaken. It is my habit in opposition. I learnt it in the jungle, shooting tigers. My gun is always heavily loaded. I take a deliberate aim. If I

shoot a tiger, it is killed; if a turtle-dove, it is blown to pieces. You comprehend.'

'Me, the turtle-dove, yes. And the be-reaved mate will peck herself to death,' said Frank, with considerable coolness.

'In a cage we can force her to live,' said Lee.

Frank had thought to meet Lee on his own ground, but found himself wholly at sea. He would strike out boldly till he touched land again.

'I am astonished,' he said, 'that a man like you, who seem to trample on conventionalities, should arrogate to himself that absurd authority claimed by some fathers over the hands of their daughters.'

'And what if it were because parental jurisdiction over marriage is becoming a thing of the past that I make myself absolute?'

'That would be very foolish,' said Frank, forgetting with whom he was dealing.

'That is no argument, my good sir,' came

from Lee at once, and Frank saw his mistake.

‘You see,’ continued Lee, ‘the idea of the parent is changing. The popular parent is the servant of his children. Now, whenever an idea, an opinion—a song, a faith, a show—becomes popular, I know at once it has some inherent weakness, some hollow lie; for the world is weak and false, and all kinds of froth and flame commend themselves to it. An opinion is like a jug of beer: the foaming head attracts the youth; the old toper blows it off.’

‘You think yourself clever, but this is rank sophistry.’

‘No argument again. Go away, Mr Hay, and learn to do something besides assert. Come back and have a talk as soon as you really have something to say.’

Frank walked slowly to the door. He was endeavouring to estimate Lee. Did all fathers treat unsuitable candidates for their daughters’ hands to such a dose of brusque philosophy? Surely not. Then, did all fathers returned from India with dark skins,



and, presumably, no livers, behave in this fashion? He could not believe it. He returned to the charge.

‘Why are you so ill-bred?’ he asked.

‘I am not ill-bred. Had I received you with anything but a downright refusal your hopes would have risen. Had I agreed with you in anything, you would have thought, “I may manage him yet!” I have been kind to you. I have been most polite. I have not deceived you for an instant. Do not think that the suave manner is the sign of the kind heart. What is called politeness is, as you know, the commonest form of hypocrisy; courtesy has become etiquette, and the gentleman is the ghost of a dead chivalry.’

‘You are a braggart as well as a sophist. You—’

‘Go away till you learn to do other than assert and call names.’

‘I will speak. You said a little while ago that when an opinion became popular, you, in effect, adopted its converse.’

‘Too hard and fast; but go on.’

‘Marriage is coming to be regarded more and more as a mere civil relation ; you will, I have no doubt, look upon it as a sacred thing. If the heart does not go along with a holy ordinance, it is the blackest sin to take part in it. Will you play the devil to your own daughter?’

‘Ah, this is better,’ said Lee, with glistening eyes. ‘In the same way any marriage not consented to by the woman’s father must be unholy also. Two evils, you see.’

‘Who can doubt which is the less?’

‘Now you are the sophist. There is no less or greater evil ; it is all tarred with the same stick. But, to take a broader view. I firmly believe that marriages are made in heaven ; therefore, I should suppose, a marriage as ordained by heaven happens once in fifty years, and it seems to me as likely that the decree of fate would be fulfilled in the father’s choice as in the daughter’s ; and much more so when the father is a past master in the study of character.’

Frank was exasperated.

‘Have you no heart?’ he said.

The smile on Lee's face told him what a commonplace he had uttered. Smothering his emotion, he said, 'You teach me how to think and how to act. Marriages *are* made in heaven, and you were not married. If you had been you would have loved your daughter. A man of your no-principles must be answered as the fool is—according to his folly. And indeed you are a kind of fool, and a bad kind. I said before, thoughtlessly, that I would stick at nothing in endeavouring to make Miss Chartres my wife. Now I repeat it with full purpose.'

'Good,' said Lee, rubbing his hands. 'Still a little too much nicknaming, but, on the whole, good. You are a capital collaborateur. I have taught you how to think and act already. Are you not astonished at yourself? What would they think at your debating club of this talk of ours? If you like it, come back and have some more.'

Frank went to the door in silence, but returned again.

'Ah!' exclaimed Lee. "'He often took leave, but was loath to depart!" What! Is it meant to be considered by me evidence of your determined spirit? Eh? Is it a dodge?'

'Ill-doers are ill-dreaders,' said Frank. 'I am not going to speak for myself, but for Muriel. You have talked of her as if she were a thing that you could turn to any use, and you have spoken of caging her. I perceive you to be most irrational and obstinate. I can imagine your going great lengths to obtain a desired end. Promise me that you will not use physical force in any—'

'I never make promises.'

'Then,' pursued Frank, in a tone of entreaty that had mastered his voice to his great annoyance, for he felt that it was enjoyed like a sacrifice by the apparently infernal spirit whom he addressed—'I demand to know what weapons you will use. Will you employ force?'

'I am always armed to the teeth.'

'You mean you are unscrupulous.'

‘Yes.’

‘It is impossible to reason with you. I defy you. Why, you are an insolent, cold-blooded villain, and deserve a horse-whipping.’

‘I will take an early opportunity of presenting you with a horsewhip to attempt the administration of one,’ said Lee, with perfect good humour.

‘Let it be very soon,’ said Frank, going, ‘for when you are my father-in-law I will decline the offer.’

Lee rose to his feet. ‘You wish this colloquy to end theatrically,’ he said. ‘I will disappoint you. You may marry my daughter, if you can.’

## CHAPTER VII

### THE UNEXPECTED

MURIEL had bribed the servant who should have shown Frank out to bring him to her sitting-room; and this was accomplished without observation. As he entered, Muriel's appearance astonished him. She looked superb in his eyes—flushed, bright, bold, a wonderful contrast to the haggard girl Lee had hurled from him half-an-hour before. The momentary defeated feeling was past. She now stood on her rights. No father or man should have treated her as Lee had done, and she replied by sticking to her purpose, and having Frank sup with her.

‘Sit, sit,’ she said. ‘We’ll not say a word about anything until we’ve supped—I mean about anything except the supper.’

They were both very hungry, and on the principle that promptitude in action is the best prayer for the success of any enterprise, dispensed with a grace. Truly, the good eater, if he masticate well, renders the best thanks. Frank and Muriel worshipped God heartily before the great mahogany altar of Britain—which was in this instance, a little one of walnut—rapidly replacing the mercy of appetite by the mercy of satisfaction.

Meantime Lee had other visitors. Mr Linty, the family lawyer, succeeded Frank almost immediately, and Miss Jane accompanied him into the library. Lee knew about him from some of the letters he had read. He was however, wholly unprepared to enter into business with him; but pleasure he expected.

After the formal courtesies, the lawyer began. He was a sandy-haired, little, dry old gentleman, and spoke very stiffly.

‘Mr Chartres,’ he said, ‘the intent with which I visit you to-day is to convey to you certain information which I think it

my duty to let you have as soon as possible.'

'I am a man of business,' said Lee.

'Good, sir; very good. Mr Chartres, an entailed estate is in a most delicate position, surrounded as it is with innumerable statutory provisions. It is doubtful whether you would be able, supposing you were so inclined, to make good a claim on Snell without proving the death of your brother Robert.'

Imagining that the lawyer had made a mistake in using Robert instead of William, and that there had been circumstances in connection with the death of the late proprietor which he had not learned; wishing, besides, to gain time, as this was the first intimation he had received of the estate being entailed, Lee said in a half-bantering tone, 'Well, you know, I never had a brother Robert.'

'Oh!' said the lawyer.

'Well,' began Miss Jane, but stopped short, not sure what to say or think.

Lee surpassed himself at this juncture.



Not a feature of his face showed he was at a loss. He turned to Miss Jane and asked, in a sort of parenthesis, 'What were you going to say?'

'Oh!' said Miss Jane, 'I think, and I always told William, that although nothing has been heard of Robert for thirty years, he may still be alive. William said that he died to the family when he became a prodigal, and forbade his name to be mentioned. I thought that uncharitable.'

'Ay,' said Lee, indifferently. 'Of course, I agreed with William.'

It was very successful.

'But,' said Mr Linty, 'we *must* speak of him, for, if he is alive, the estate is his. Do you know anything of him?'

'No,' said Lee; 'but as we have not heard of him for thirty years, we may reasonably suppose him dead.'

'By no means. That cannot even be taken as presumptive evidence. If there were seventy years from the birth of your brother there would be no difficulty, but if he is alive he will only be fifty-five. I

am afraid the estate will require to be 'hung up'—put into the hands of trustees.'

'Well, sir,' said Lee, rising, 'your contribution to this work is wholly unexpected, but likely to produce most interesting complications. I am indeed much obliged to you. There is nothing original in it, but a missing heir is a very good thing to fall back on.'

The lawyer, supposing he had heard an elaborate, and, if so, certainly incomprehensible joke, laughed appreciatively. Miss Jane frowned and examined Lee all over with scorn and minuteness.

The latter continued. 'You must really excuse me just now. I only reached Snell House a few hours ago, and I am in no condition to discuss business. I suppose,' with a laugh, 'you won't turn us out immediately.'

'By no means,' said Mr Linty. 'In all likelihood there will be no need for that. I shall expect a visit from you to-morrow. Good evening.'

Miss Jane, who was a great friend of

Mr Linty's, left the library to see him to the door.

Lee's next visitor was of a different quality. He was an old man, very ill-dressed, the great size of his head, which was covered with thick white hair, being the most notable thing about him. Miss Jane introduced him, having met him at the door when she parted with the lawyer.

'This is Clacher, brother,' she said. 'You remember it was he who found William's body on the road.'

Lee did remember, as it had been mentioned in one of the letters he had read. Miss Jane informed Lee further, under her breath, that Clacher was quite mad, although harmless, and that he got a living by begging in the disguise of a hawker. He had called often since the death of William, asking for the 'new Mr Chartres.'

'I am very glad you have brought him to me,' said Lee. 'He may be useful.'

He then advanced to the old pedlar,

and held out his hand, saying, 'How do you do, Mr Clacher?'

Clacher emitted a chuckling noise, and darted glances at odd corners of the room—glances which, if it had been possible to enclose them, would have been found to resemble blind alleys, as they ran a certain distance into space and stopped without lighting on anything. Then he said in a hoarse, harsh voice, speaking to himself as much as to Lee, 'I'm gaun tae dae it Englified.'

He pulled himself up with all the appearance of a man about to make a lengthy statement; but instead of a speech he only succeeded in a pitiful pantomimic display. He could not remember what he had come to say. As if to stir up his dormant faculties, he began rubbing his head with both hands, gathering his thick hair into shocks, and then scattering these asunder. While endeavouring to make hay of his hair in this manner, his little fierce eyes, like swivel-guns of exceedingly minute calibre, resumed firing their blank shots into space. Then,

satisfied, apparently, that nothing could be done toward the tending of his hair, he rubbed his shaved cheeks, beat his forehead and his breast, and tore at the fingers of both hands.

All at once he stood erect, and as if he were resuming a train of thought, or a conversation, said, 'It's a wonnerfu' secret.'

'Indeed?' said Lee, quietly.

'Ay; for it can pit another in the deid man's shoes ye staun' in. But I was gaun tae dae it Englified. Ye nicht check me when I gang wrang.'

'Check you when you go wrong?'

'That's it! "Go wrong"—no, "gang wrang." Keep me richt—right, will you, sir?'

'It's of no consequence to me, my good man,' replied Lee, 'whether you speak Englified as you call it, or not; but I'll keep you right if you like.'

'Thank you, thank you! But whaat—'

'What,' said Lee.

'Bide a wee, bide a wee!' cried Clacher, rubbing his hair.

‘Ye see,’ he continued, ‘if I tak’ time tae dae it Englified, I forget it. Whaat wis it I wis gaun tae dae Englified, and whaat for wis I gaun to dae it Englified? I canna’ mind, I canna’ mind.’

‘Never mind, then,’ said Lee, gently. ‘You interest me as much as any character in the story. It seems indeed to be made to my hand, and I shall only require to mould it here and there in order to give it distinction.’

‘Ye’re mad, ye’re mad!’ cried Clacher, excitedly, shaking his big frowsy head, and seeing Lee for the first time, although his eyes had seemed fixed on him repeatedly.

‘Poor fellow!’ said Lee to Miss Jane, ‘he thinks everybody mad but himself, like all lunatics.’

‘Lunatics,’ said Miss Jane, emphatically, ‘are unerring judges of the lunacy of others.’

‘I’ve heard that too,’ said Lee, ingenuously.

‘My good friend,’ he continued, addressing Clacher, ‘we must really try and re-

member what and why it is to be done Englified. Come with me and you shall have something to eat and a glass of good wine. If that doesn't startle your memory I don't know what will.'

Miss Jane looked volumes, but only said, 'Henry, there never was a man so changed as you.'

'My dear Jane,' said Lee, 'in ten years—why, I might have become a lunatic too.'

As he crossed the hall with Clacher to the dining-room, a sound of laughter from upstairs struck on his ear. He stopped, and listened. It was repeated, and the laughing voices were Muriel's and another's. Entering the dining-room he hastily confided Clacher to the care of Briscoe and Dempster, who were discussing a bottle of port, and hurried away to Muriel's sitting-room. He went in without knocking, and another peal of laughter came to an early death. Frank and Muriel stood up as the door opened. She meant to fight; he recognised the falseness of their

position, and felt, as he looked, exceedingly awkward.

‘Father,’ began Muriel, looking in Lee’s direction, but past him, through the open door, ‘you must not—’

She got no further ; for she saw coming towards her room, in single file, Miss Jane, Dempster, Briscoe and Clacher. It is pretty certain that none of these four persons knew exactly why they had come upstairs. Miss Jane probably expected some kind of scene to take place at which she might have an interest in assisting ; Dempster followed her out of sheer stupidity ; Briscoe came after Dempster because he was drunk ; and Clacher after him because he was mad, and didn’t know any better. When Miss Jane, arriving at the top of the staircase, saw Muriel’s door open, she hesitated ; but behind her there came such a motley procession that she had to go on. She stopped at the door ; the others stood about her in a semi-circle, and the *tableau* was complete.

Lee, the only individual of the seven who was thoroughly collected, said, looking round



him meditatively, 'The situation is turning out better than it promised to. After all, what more can we do, either in writing fiction or creating it, than follow an indication, and let the rest come.'

He then motioned Miss Jane aside, and taking Briscoe's hand, led him into the room. The maudlin gravity with which that worthy bore himself, combined with a remarkable bulging about the pockets, made him a very comic figure, and raised a smile even on Muriel's face. But Lee took one of her hands and put it in one of Briscoe's, saying, 'Muriel, this is your future husband.'

She turned very pale, and almost fainted, when a hazy smile struggled into Briscoe's slack mouth and dull eyes, and he attempted to kiss her. She broke from him with a half-suppressed exclamation of disgust, and would have thrown her arms round Frank; but Lee seized her, and handed her over to her aunt, who had entered the room,

'Leave my house,' he then said to Frank, with a gesture of authority.

It was a peculiar position for the young

man, and Lee watched him with intense interest. Frank walked to Muriel, kissed her on the cheek, whispered something in her ear, and then passed out through the little crowd at the door without looking to the right hand or the left.

‘Very good!’ exclaimed Lee. ‘Perhaps that’s the best thing he could have done.’

‘But, Henry,’ said Miss Jane, ‘I think Mr Dempster would like to marry Muriel.’

‘Me!’ shouted Dempster, spirally. ‘No; I assure you. My dear Miss Jane, I would as soon think of marrying you. Eh—ah—I mean well—’

Miss Jane’s face quivered a second, but she said nothing, and left the room. Dempster, aghast at his dreadful mistake, followed her downstairs. Clacher, unable to make up his mind whether to stick by Briscoe or follow Dempster, sat down disconsolately on the top step, with his elbows on his knees and his head between his hands. Lee also went out, signing to Briscoe to follow him. Then Lee locked Muriel into her room, and putting the

key in his pocket, took Briscoe and Clacher to the library with him.

It was half-past nine when Muriel found herself a prisoner ; and Frank had whispered that he would wait for her all night at the low wall.

## CHAPTER VIII

### BRISCOE SEES THINGS IN A NEW LIGHT

FOOD and drink were provided for Clacher in the library. It was a very large room, and he sat at a little table in the corner, out of hearing of the low tones in which Briscoe and Lee conversed.

Lee was exceedingly angry at Briscoe for having got tipsy, and rated him severely getting no response, however, save laughter or a drunken 'You shut up.' At last, losing patience, he dashed a tumbler of water in the drunken man's face. Briscoe rose to strike; but Lee gave him another tumbler, and while he was still rubbing the water out of his eyes, a third, which knocked him down into his chair again, pretty well sobered and very surly. Lee was a man of great physical strength, and although on

several occasions Briscoe had been able to control his will, a single bout at fisticuffs had shown, once for all, who was master in that branch of dialectic.

‘My dear Briscoe,’ said Lee, handing him his handkerchief to help to dry himself, ‘this is really too bad of you. Do you think I don’t know the meaning of those stuffed pockets of yours? You’ve been helping yourself, forgetting altogether the work of art in which we are engaged.’

‘Heaven helps those that help themselves,’ growled Briscoe, still a little maudlin and very crusty.

‘A very good proverb indeed; but it has always seemed to me to require a gloss, as say, “Help yourself, and Heaven will develop heroic qualities in you by opposing you.” So you see I am interfering with you to give your acts a higher tone. You’ll have to empty out your pockets, my boy. Nobody need know; and, if they should, kleptomania is quite genteel.’

‘Now, look here,’ said Briscoe: ‘I’m not fit for this almighty art of yours. By Jove,

when I think of where I am, and what we're up to, I can hardly believe it's me! Just you give me as much money as you can, and let me slope quietly, and you'll get on far better without me. I never could grease myself and worm through the tight places—get through the world, as folks say; and I tell you it would be far better for you if I were away.

'Briscoe, I have always admired your independent character,' said Lee. 'Neither can I get through the world; but there's another method which equally ensures success, and that is, to transcend the world: death by starvation is then itself a glorious triumph—the triumph of the idea. I know what I mean, and though I were to explain till doomsday, you wouldn't, so it don't matter. You will confer a lasting benefit on the world if you stay and help with the work in which I am engaged. It is a glorious labour, apart from its artistic merit; for it is raising the tone of everybody about me. It is just what these people needed, especially Muriel and Frank—the dash of bitter that

strengthens the sweet, the need for rebellion that wakens the soul, the spur that drives natures roughshod over convention, the—'

'Draw it mild,' interposed Briscoe, sneeringly. 'To-morrow, or maybe to-night, Caroline will be down with the real man, and what will you do then?'

'I long for their arrival. That will be the great scene.'

'What'll you do?'

'Well, murder I merely glanced at. To turn them out of the house as impostors, though a simple solution of the matter for a short time would only stave off a final settlement. This is what I intend: to shut up Chartres in one of the rooms, pinioned, and, if necessary, gagged, as a dangerous lunatic, until I can have him removed to a private asylum, which will be a matter of only a few hours; and, once there, we are safer than if he were in the grave.'

'How will you manage that?'

'The simplest thing in the world. You can't have read many novels or you wouldn't ask. Besides the novels, however, I have

studied the lunacy laws ; and I could put you, Briscoe—sensible, hard-headed fellow as you are—into an asylum to-morrow, and defy the world to take you out.'

'By Jove, there's a chance here!' said Briscoe. 'Damn it, man, banish your dreams, and do the thing as a downright piece of the finest villainy ever perpetrated.'

'I haven't the least objection, my dear Briscoe, that you should be a villain. There's not one, at present, in the work, and if you choose, still collaborating with me, to adopt such a *rôle*, I shall be very glad indeed.'

'I'll do it,' said Briscoe, rising. 'I'll go off to Glasgow and prepare the whole thing for to-morrow early.'

'The last train from Greenock left some time ago.'

'What! is it so late as that?'

'Yes; but you can go off to-morrow before breakfast.'

'Very well. But we're going to do this, mind! No shamming—no artistic flourishes—upright, downright villainy!'



'On your part, certainly.'

'And I'm to marry Muriel?'

'Oh, you must see that is impossible. The girl will fight to the death against it. Besides, it would be thoroughly inartistic. No, no. My intention is to bring about an elopement; and then to discover that you are Frank's father. You see? You're old enough. He's only twenty-two, and you're over forty. The invention of antecedents and the getting up evidence will be most engrossing. Of course, I'll intercept these young people, and drive them to the very last resource. It will do them any amount of good.'

Briscoe put up his hand warningly, and Lee turned his head and saw Clacher standing behind him.

'Ah! my good friend,' he said, 'have you had enough?'

'Ay,' said Clacher.

'Do you remember what it is you want to do "Englified"?''

'No—yet.'

'Do you think you'll remember soon?'

‘Mebbe, if ye’ll let me alone, and gie me some mair drink. Whusky.’

‘Certainly,’ said Lee, rising. ‘You can have this room to yourself, and I shall send you whisky.’

‘I think I’ll go to bed,’ said Briscoe. ‘I’m very tired; and I’ll have an early start to-morrow.’

‘Come out and smoke a cigar with me first,’ said Lee. And then in a whisper, ‘I want you to help me. They may arrive any moment.’

‘Of course,’ replied Briscoe, in the same tone, clenching his fists. ‘I forgot that.’

So Clacher was left with a decanter of whisky; and as soon as he was alone he pulled from his breast pocket a dirty letter, which he read and re-read, and thought over and got madder about; and he always took the other glass of whisky, muttering to himself, ‘I canna’ mind, I canna’ mind.’

## CHAPTER IX

### DEMPSTER APOLOGISES

WHILE Briscoe was being sobered in the library, a remarkable scene transacted itself in the dining-room between Miss Jane and Dempster. The outraged lady settled herself in an easy-chair with a book; but the offender entered before she had time to read six lines. He approached her on tip-toe, and, a spring seeming to give way somewhere within him, he came down plump on one knee, as if he had been a puppet, and burst out woefully, 'Eh — ah!' like an escape of saw dust.

Miss Jane ignored him, and pressed open her book, which was new and stiff.

Dempster cleared his throat of the saw-dust, and with drooping head, his left hand on his left knee and his right arm hanging

limp, whispered, just above his breath, 'Miss Chartres, you see before you a miserable being.'

'I don't; I'm not looking,' said the lady, sharply, disconcerting Dempster terribly.

'If you would look you would see me,' he said nervously, as several watch-springs seemed to break out of bounds in various parts of his anatomy.

Miss Jane looked over the top of her book. She saw him collapsed before her with abased eyes, and was satisfied. So she hid her face again, smiling, and said coldly, 'I have seen you.'

'Have you?' said Dempster, going off, as it were accidentally, like a gun; 'I'm very glad: for I would have had no rest of mind or body if you hadn't looked at me. I would have gone about like a hen that had lost her—I mean—'

'Well, and say ill, Mr Dempster,' said Miss Jane, unable to resist the chance which she had long desired to take. 'These kind of people often make more mischief than ill-doers,' she added.

This overwhelmed Dempster. Down he came on the other knee, and, clasping both hands, called out in serpentine anguish, and without a stammer, 'Why are you so hard on me? The moment I made that unfortunate remark about marrying you, the earth, the sun, my wealth, and life and death were to me no more than they are to a poor man. I assure you, I assure you—I don't exaggerate; and I beg you, I implore you to forgive me.'

'Rise, Mr Dempster,' said Miss Jane with a slight return of graciousness. 'There is really nothing to forgive.'

Some automatic winding-up process began within him and would soon have brought him to his feet with a bound, but Miss Jane's reply to his 'And we will be friends as we were before?' made him all run down again; for the lady said, 'That can hardly be. Though mistakes may not require forgiveness, they cannot always be forgotten. But rise, please.'

'I'll not rise till you forget,' said Dempster, with pitiful resignation, his

various members barely hanging together. The poor fellow was in deader earnest than even Miss Jane supposed, as will shortly appear.

‘But I cannot forget,’ said the lady. ‘Thought is free, and self-willed besides, Mr Dempster.’

He clasped his hands again, and in a succession of spasms ejaculated, ‘You are the only woman whose society I have any comfort in. You understand me; and your advice is always good, and—eh—ah—agreeable. You never snub me—at least, not often, and not without good reason—like younger, like thoughtless hoydens. If you won’t forget and be friends with me again, I don’t know whatever I’m to do. I have nothing at all to think of now Muriel has rejected me; and I’ll have nobody I can talk to with any frankness if you go on remembering.’

Miss Jane’s blood, which was not by any means a meagre decoction, but, on the contrary, rich and sweet enough yet, tingled to her finger ends. This man actually needed

her! She laid aside her book, leant forward a little, resting her hands neatly in her lap. There was no smile, but she looked with a gentle earnestness, and the tang was gone from her tongue.

‘How am I to forget?’ she said. ‘Tell me that, and I’ll try. I suppose *you* have not forgotten what you said—very bitter words for any woman to digest. You would as soon think of marrying me as of marrying a young hoyden, who, from what I can make out, had just rejected you with insult; and the tone of voice—the tone of voice! But rise, Mr Dempster.’

‘I won’t,’ he said, looking her right in the face, and wondering that he had never noticed before how silky her brown hair was, and how kindly her brown eyes. ‘I won’t. Forget, and then I’ll rise.’

‘How can I forget?’ softly.

‘Just as easily as I can rise. The mind is like legs; it can be bent and unbent.’

Now Miss Jane was not very much of a prude; but Dempster was becoming too confident. He must be brought low again.

So she lifted her book and said, 'Shocking!'

'I beg your pardon,' he cried, vexed at finding the stumbling-block, which he had nearly rolled up to the top and kicked over the other side out of sight for ever, down at the bottom of the hill again. 'I didn't mean to say,' trying to twist his fingers into a hay-band, 'that your mind was like my legs—oh, dear me! I've put both feet in it now!'

Miss Jane hid her face completely, but it was to conceal a smile.

Dempster smoothed his cheeks with both hands and held his head for a second or two, all of him gathered up in a more powerful effort to think than he had ever made in his life before.

'What can I do to make you forget?' he muttered.

'Ah!' he cried, after a second, pulling the book from Miss Jane's face as a child might have done, 'I think I'm going to have an idea.'

'You don't mean to say so!' said Miss



Jane, leaning forward again in the same neat, pleasant way, with a laugh that was almost girlish.

‘Yes, I believe I am,’ said Dempster, sitting down on the calves of his legs with his hands on his knees, and looking up trustfully, like something in indiarubber.

‘If I were to say,’ he enunciated slowly, ‘something contradicting emphatically what you can’t at present forget, you might—eh—ah—forget?’

‘Yes.’

He had been about a foot from her, and he now scraped along the ground on his knees until he almost touched hers.

‘You might try to say something of that kind,’ she said, blushing, and with a little gasp. Now that it seemed to be coming she was put out; but, like a brave woman having her last chance, she kept her position and smiled encouragingly.

‘Might I? Oh, thank you!’ he cried, with effusion.

Then he knitted his brows and rubbed his head. His serpentine faculty was in

abeyance—these involuntaries of his had to cease in order that he might once in his life attempt to think.

As for Miss Jane, she was mistaken in imagining that he had the least notion of making love to her. He valued her only as a friend, and had splashed into the quicksand of a proposal of marriage without knowing it. She thought, however, that he only needed a touch to make him bury himself, like a flounder, head over ears in a declaration of love and an offer of his hand and heart; so she gave him that touch softly and sweetly.

‘You said,’ quoth she, ‘with the utmost disdain, that you would as soon think of marrying me as my insolent niece.’

‘I did, I did. Can you help me to contradict it emphatically?’

‘I’m afraid not—dear Mr Dempster.’

‘Eh?’ said he. ‘Thank you.’

He felt dimly that there was something in the air—dimly, as protoplasm may feel its existence.

‘Ah!’ he cried. ‘Here’s a kind of notion.

I wonder if it's an idea. Would it do to say, in order to make you forget, just the opposite of what I said? You see—you understand—something like this, meaning—of course, you know what I mean—nothing more, you know—eh—ah!—suppose I say, “I would far rather marry you than Muriel.” Is that—emphatic enough?’

Miss Jane bent forward, and put her head on his left shoulder, and her hand on his right.

‘Mr Dempster!’ she said. ‘Alec!’ she sighed.

‘Eh?—eh—ah!’—and he had to hold her—to clutch her, to save himself from falling.

‘I’m the happiest woman in the world.’

‘I’m—I’m very glad of it.’

‘I never loved anybody before,’ she said, so sweetly that Dempster wondered.

Then she buried her face in his neck, she did, the stupid, soft-hearted creature, and whispered, ‘Oh, the torture of wooing you for Muriel! But now I have my reward!’

And she did think this as she said it,

although it had never occurred to her before.

‘Yes,’ said Dempster, feeling that the pause must be filled up somehow. ‘Of course,’ he added, making a half-hearted attempt to force her back into her chair, which she mistook for a caress, ‘I only suggested the contradiction. I did not—’

But her eyes were shut, and her brain too.

‘I adore your modesty,’ she whispered. ‘Trust me, trust me. I will love you till death.’

‘I’m completely stumped,’ exclaimed Dempster.

‘Poor dear!’ said Miss Jane, mistaking. And indeed it was pardonable, Dempster’s metaphors being usually marked by a *curiosa infelicitas*.

Here the door opened briskly and Mrs Cherry, the housekeeper, burst into the room.

‘Losh me! Miss Chartres!’ she cried, as the pair scrambled to their feet.

‘Mrs Cherry,’ said Miss Jane, with great

presence of mind, in spite of a distinct tremor in her voice, 'since you have seen I may as well tell you. Mr Dempster is going to marry me. But why did you come in without knocking, and what do you want?'

Mrs Cherry made a dreadful mess of her story. It will be clearer to the reader in a form different from that which she gave to it.

The housekeeper's room was on the ground floor, and directly under Muriel's sitting-room. About half-past nine Mrs Cherry's gossip, Mrs Shaw, dropped in for a chat. These two good women were widows of fifty, and whatever their talk began with, it usually ended in laudation of their sainted husbands. The crack reached that stage about ten o'clock on the night of our story, and Mrs Shaw's panegyric was soon in full blast.

'Maister Shaw,' she said, twiddling her thumbs, 'wis a fine man. The cliverest, godliest, brawest Christian, an' a gentleman though he merrit me. He could

write, ay, an' coont, mind ye, for a' the warl' as weel as ony bairn o' fourteen in thae days when a' body's brats gang to the schule. An' for readin'—losh, wumman! —he would sit glowerin' at a pippier a' `nicht wi' the interestedest look in his een—sae dwamt-like that ye wad hae' thoct he didna' ken a word.'

'What's that?' said Mrs Cherry, starting in her chair.

'What's what?' said Mrs Shaw.

'I thoct I heard a scart at the windy, an' somethin' gie a saft thump on the gravel.'

'Ne'er a bit o't. Some maukin loupin' alang, or mebbe a rotten or a moosie clawin' in the wa' tae let us ken it's time we were beddit, and the hoose quate, for it tae come oot and pike the crumbs on the flare, an' toast its bit broon back in the ase. I mind fine sitting at oor ingle ae Januwar nicht wi' Maister Shaw. He had a pippier, an' I was knittin'. There was nae soond but the wag-at-the-wa' tick-tickin', like an arti-fecial cricket with the busiest, couthiest birr, an' my wairs gaun clickaty-click, when

I heard a cheep, cheep. Maister Shaw an' me lookit up thegither, an' there we saw, sittin' on the bar fornent the emp'y side—for the chimbley was that big we aye keepit a fire in the half o't only—the gauciest, birkiest, sleekest wratch o' a moose, cockin' its roon' pukit lugs, an' keekin' by the corners o' naethin' wi' its bit pints o' een. By-an'-by it gied anither chirp, an' syne we heard a kin' o' a smo'ored cheepin' at the back o' the lum; an' in a gliffin' seeven wee bonny moosikies happit oot a hole that naebody wad hae' thocht o' bein' there, an' crooched in a raw, winkin' on their minnie. I lookit at Maister Shaw, an' he turn't up his een like a deid blaeck in the dumb-fooderdest way; an' his pipper gied the gentiest sough o' a rooshle; an' whan we lookit at the grate again we just got a glint o' the wairy tail o' the big moose weekin intae its hole. But lord hae' mercy! What's that?'

'I tell't ye!' quoth Mrs Cherry.

'Gosh me! There it's again!'

Twice a sound similar to that which had

first startled Mrs Cherry was repeated—a slight swish past the window, and a flop on the gravel.

The two old ladies sat with their hands clasped and their mouths open. Neither of them had the courage to pull up the blind, and watch if on a third repetition the sound should be accompanied by any sight. In a few seconds a louder, harder thud, preceded by no rubbing on the window, and followed by a noise as of someone running on the gravel, appalled the two old dames. Screaming, they flew to the kitchen, where Mrs Cherry left her friend, and hurrying to the dining-room, in her fright threw open the door without announcing herself, and interrupted so interesting a *tête-à-tête*.

Miss Jane, by dint of interrogation and remorseless interruption, which sometimes failed in its object—that of restoring to Mrs Cherry the thread of her story—at length understood, discarding a vast quantity of irrelevant information, that the two women had been frightened by



strange noises at the window of the house-keeper's room. Shrewdly guessing as to its cause, she was proceeding with Dempster to institute a formal investigation into the mystery, when a much more incomprehensible affair met her in the hall.

This is what she saw: Lee and Briscoe carrying the body of a man—who might be dead or unconscious, and whose face was covered with a handkerchief—and followed by a tall comely woman, sobbing bitterly. They passed upstairs. Miss Jane, Dempster, and the housekeeper were still standing at the door of the dining-room, amazed and silent, when Lee came down.

‘You must allow this to pass unquestioned at present,’ he said loftily. ‘It is a very serious and sorrowful matter, and I would prefer to explain it to-morrow.’

‘Very well, Henry,’ said Miss Jane, even more loftily, ‘you know your own affairs best. By-the-bye,’ she added, as if it were a matter of course, ‘from what Mrs Cherry tells me, I think Muriel has jumped out of the window.’

‘By Jove! Where should she go?’

‘To the north wall, of course.’

‘To be sure.’

Snatching a riding-whip from a rack, he strode to the door, but turned and said, ‘This must be left entirely to me — entirely,’ he repeated, as Miss Jane began to remonstrate.

She was much huffed, but withdrew into the dining - room with Dempster, and the housekeeper returned to her room.

Lee had received his first check. Hitherto everybody and everything had obeyed him; but now Briscoe had spoiled part of his plan. Briscoe’s courage had soon ebbed in the coolness of the night air, and, instead of allowing the scene to take place which Lee wished in order to justify him in having Chartres bound and gagged as a madman, he had made the latter insensible the moment he stepped out of the cab which had driven him and Caroline from Greenock. This was done with chloroform, a bottle of which he had found while

rummaging through the bedroom assigned to him. Caroline he had quieted by assuring her that if she said one word of betrayal he would at once put an end to Chartres's life — a threat which, having regard to what had already taken place, she did not care to brave.

In this way Briscoe had taken the lead, reducing Lee to the necessity of acting along with him for the nonce.

## CHAPTER X

### THE NIGHT BREEZE

FRANK sat on the north wall watching the moon through the leaves. Her light was faint, for the skirts of the day still swept the west. He had watched her for half-an-hour—the pale crescent, which even in that short time had seemed to wane, as her light waxed and her horns grew keener on the night's front—the high forlorn hope of heaven's host that could not all that month drive out the day. He sat under the close silence of the elm, among whose leaves there crept the faint, veiled murmur of the seaboard, fingered by the brooding surges as they beat out their slow, uncertain, soft-swelling music. Now and again there came, twining among the mellow notes of

the water, from some far field, the corn-crake's brazen call, and made the gold ring stronger. These sounds, the pale moonlight, the night, and the idea of Muriel, possessed him to the exclusion of thought. Passion rendered him impassive, and he waited without impatience. Slowly peeling from the tower in Gourock, ten strokes told the hour. A crackling twig, a footstep, a rustle, and Muriel was beside him.

Nothing was said till she had recovered her breath; then her voice, tuned unconsciously to the rippling accompaniment of the waves, whispered clear, 'When you had gone, my father locked me in my room. The thought of waiting and waiting here all night would soon have made me mad, so I got out by the window. I threw out a cushion, and then I was frightened. But after a little my courage came back again, and then I threw over two more, and dropped down quite soft. I don't know whether any one saw or heard me; but you wanted me, and I'm here. See, I tore my dress.'

He kissed her dress.

'You must not enter your father's house again,' he said.

Her breath came quick; she took his arm, and looked at him intently.

'Do you know your father?' he asked.

'He is difficult; but I am beginning to.'

'Then you will understand why his house is not for you.'

She had only a look with which to answer, and he did not think it satisfactory.

'Tell me,' he said, 'do you understand?'

'No; I do not. My father wants me to marry a stranger, but he cannot make me.'

'Then you do not know him. He has no scruples; he will do anything.'

'What can he have said to impress you so?'

'He said enough to show me he has no conscience, and that he looks on you as a mere puppet.'

Muriel felt as if the world were breaking up on all sides. What strange new things the day had brought forth; and, to crown them, flight from home seemed imminent! She pressed to her side Frank's arm, and

with her disengaged hand smoothed the collar of his coat and fastened the top button, all the while looking wistfully at his set face. The ears of both were ringing with their own blood, or they would have heard a movement among the branches; for at that moment Lee reached the elm. His intention was to interrupt at once, and get back to the ravelled skein in the house; but the vision of the two lovers solaced his artistic sense; he was so near that he could hear their whispers. Shall not an artist take delight in his own work? Chance would help him, as it had done, manfully. He would watch this scene out. Surely he held the strings; and these, his daintiest puppets, he must see them play their best.

‘You must come away with me,’ said Frank, hoarsely. ‘See, I would have you what is called elope, and I am scrupulous. I do not know if such an action can be justified by our position even to ourselves. Your father has no scruples. Conceive what he will do.’

Two incidents flashed into Muriel's mind ; the elopement of one former schoolmate, and the forced marriage of another ; both ending in death by heartbreak of the young wives. She was angry at herself that these should have occurred to her. Frank and she !—they were apart from the world. Yet she whispered, ' You surely exaggerate.'

' No ; I do not,' he said. ' Come with me, just now. We are in Scotland. I will marry you to-night—regularly, to-morrow. You needn't fear ; I have plenty of money.'

' Oh, Frank !' she cried, reproachfully, ' if I thought my marrying you depended on running off just now, I would go although you hadn't a penny.'

' It does, it does Step on the wall, and I will help you down.'

This command, and the action which accompanied it, roused her. She had not fully realised the purpose that made his pleading so earnest, until he seized her quickly, and lifted her towards the wall.

Lee grasped his whip tightly, and was ready for a spring.



'Put me down,' said Muriel.

Frank hesitated for a moment. It came into his brain to profess a misunderstanding of her meaning, and lift her over; but looking in her eyes he blushed with shame at the imagination of such a deceit. When she was free she seated herself at the root of the tree, and clasped her knees, gazing at vacancy. She sat for a full minute. He did not interrupt her meditation. He scarcely thought that she had divined his momentary impulse. Nevertheless, he felt as if she had, and punished himself by remaining silent and apart. He watched her face. It was a sweet perplexity. He chafed to think that he could not resolve her difficulty.

At length her brow cleared. She rose and went to the wall. She looked up and down the road and over her shoulder enchantingly. Then she lifted her skirts over the wall and sat with her back to Frank. In a second she turned round, and dropped with a little laugh into the road. He sprang after her, and seized her hand. Lee ap-

proached the wall, but still kept himself concealed.

‘Muriel!’ Frank whispered breathlessly.

‘Frank,’ she said, giving him her hand, ‘I will do what you think right. That’s what I meant by coming over the wall—I am in your hands. But first I will tell you what I think. My father wishes me to marry his friend. That is all we know at present. If the time should come when I must either obey my father or fly with you, you know what I would do. But I do not see that that time can ever come.’

‘Yes,’ said he. ‘But if your father should give you this alternative—either to marry his friend or remain single?’

‘I was coming to that, although it seems too ridiculous to be likely. Well, we would elope.’

There was silence for several seconds. Unwittingly they had to accustom themselves to the changed environment, although the difference was slight. Their natures were so quickened, so responsive, that soon a perfect accord existed between them and

the latticeless moonbeams, the wide, open night, and the undeadened music of the surges. They crossed the road in order to be wholly free of the shade of the elm, not thinking why they did so. Lee, on his knees behind the wall, watched them with glowing eyes.

At length Frank said, 'You are here; you are beautiful; you are hopeful; and you make me hopeful too. I have dreamt so long of having you that I cannot, with you beside me, imagine our not being married. But I force myself to remember your father's determined tone, his cold-blooded sophistries. I heard the worst, most insolent, most foul, most damnable—'

'Frank!'

'Most foolish talk fall from your father's lips about you, Muriel. It is horrible to talk to you in this way; but I tremble when I think of your being left to your father's tender mercies. Listen. I have challenged him to keep you from me, and he has accepted the challenge. I regret it now. He said that he would use every means;

that he was always armed to the teeth: so I resolved at once to run away with you, and dared him. I have been rash—or should I save you in spite of yourself?’

She looked at the ground, working with both hands at the buttons of her dress. He had described her mental condition as well as his own. His presence had cast into the shade the recollection of her talk with Lee. The threat contained in what Lee had said about ‘coming to the point and never returning to it’ now assumed portentous shape in her fancy, quickened by Frank’s forebodings; and the happy, trustful, resolved expression which her face had worn when she climbed over the wall gave place to one of wretched doubt.

Frank, watching her closely, would not take advantage of her wavering mood, and refrained from word or action. His whole endeavour had been to overcome her repugnance to an elopement; yet when it was shaken, he made no attempt to improve the occasion. He felt that to do so would be like striking a man when he

is down. What he aimed at was to make her throw him the reins and be passive. This she had seemed to do when she went over the wall, but the surrender had not been absolute.

‘I am puzzled,’ she said hastily, knitting her brows at the moon. ‘I cannot decide. I shall tell you how I am thinking, and then, perhaps, I shall find out what it is right to think. It is clearer to think aloud. Elopement! It is a bad, vulgar thing. It would be in all the papers—forgive me, love! I am thinking that way. I can’t help it. People would joke about it as long as we lived. My father would never forgive me. Frank—Frank Hay! I love him, and he loves me. My father doesn’t love me. Frank wants me to elope. What would it matter about newspapers and society when we were married? I am a foolish girl. It always comes round to this: Would it be right just now? Could it ever be right? Here I am in the road. You must decide.’

This was spoken with extraordinary em-

phasis, and at a great rate of speed; and when it was done, the trouble passed off her face. It settled on his. He pushed his hat from his forehead, thrust his hands into his pockets, confronting her, and said, 'I hoped for this, and intended to carry you off in triumph. Whatever withholds me, I cannot.'

Vacillation is not always the sign of a weak nature. The wind veers round the compass, and then the gale sets in steadily. Frank had never been on such a high sea of moral difficulty before. He had some crew of principles; but they were not abodied, having slept for the most part through the plain sailing of his life. When the storm came, the drowsy helmsman, Conscience, started up rubbing his blinking eyes, and Will, the captain, had no order to give.

He climbed the wall, and held down his hands to Muriel. She put one foot in a little hole, he pulled her up and they were again under the elm, Lee barely escaping discovery.

Now, just at the instant Frank gave

Muriel his hands, and she clambered up the wall with the grace of a wild thing and the necessary free movements; just when her panting body was in his arms, and her breath upon his face, there came out of the south one long, gentle, trembling, warm sigh, bearing a burden of subtle odour from the half-reaped hayfields, and making the trees shiver with delight through all their happy branches, and the sap swell and trickle to the very tips of the downiest twigs. It was Summer kissing Nature in the night. Frank and Muriel were caught in the contagion. Passion whirled round their hearts that had been held by consciences alike inexperienced, and the poor helmsmen were overset. Their blood rattled along their veins like uncontrolled rudder-chains. He lifted her over; and, taking her in his arms again when he joined her in the road, started to carry her. They would be married that night.

A long shadow thrown suddenly across the road arrested him, and immediately a tall figure stood up in the moonlight. He

set Muriel on her feet behind him, and faced Lee.

‘Mr Chartres!’ he exclaimed hoarsely.

‘You wished,’ said Lee, handing him the riding-whip, ‘for an opportunity to horsewhip me.’

‘Villain!’ cried Frank, savagely, seizing the whip. He raised it to strike. His rage was simply that of a foiled animal.

‘Haven’t you got over that bad habit of calling names yet?’ said Lee, with a smile, as he caught the hand that held the descending whip. Frank shifted it to the other hand, which Lee grasped as quickly. Thus Lee held by the wrist a hand of Frank’s in each of his.

Muriel uttered a little scream and fell on her knees. She kept her eyes fixed on the whip. It jerked about overhead for a few seconds and fell to the ground. Then she looked at the men. Their arms were locked round each other. They staggered about and knocked against the wall. She heard them breathing hard. She held her



own breath. She had scarcely begun to think what would be the upshot when Frank fell with a thud on his back, and Lee stood over him whip in hand.

'You have killed him!' she screamed, starting to her feet, and rushing to her prostrate lover.

'Hardly,' said Lee, throwing the whip away, rather ostentatiously, as he stepped aside to let Frank rise. He got up looking very unheroic; indeed, decidedly sheepish. Lee folded his arms, paler, if anything, than the other, and said, 'I won't ask you to try another fall. I think I am just twice as strong as you. I mean this to be a lesson. If you are wise, you will not attempt to struggle with me in anything.'

Frank stood with his eyes fixed on the ground, his self-esteem had fallen with his body; Muriel had seen him beaten.

Lee, resting a hand on Muriel's shoulder, and forcing her to stand beside him when she shrank away, said gaily, 'She is really a splendid girl, this daughter of mine.'

How handsome she looks just now! You must be chagrined horribly when you think that you almost had her. My dear boy, I pity you sincerely. I don't know exactly what course you should follow. It would be very striking, certainly, if you were to go off and drown yourself at once; but I don't think you'll do that. For myself I would prefer that you shouldn't. I like you too well, and hope that you will continue to play a part in our story. Perhaps you might take to drink. That's a good idea. Go in for dissipation; there's nothing like it for the cure of romance. Unworldly diseases need worldly remedies. And yet that's too common, especially with lady novelists. I believe you'll hit on some bright course of your own, for you're a capital collaborateur. I must thank you and Muriel for this scene. I've witnessed it all. Oh, you needn't be ashamed!' for Frank shut his eyes tightly, and Muriel hid her face in her hands. 'You're most delightful young people. The way you answered at once to that soft, warm gust

charmed me, charmed me. I understand it all perfectly. I also am at one with nature. Well, good-night. Come, Muriel.'

Taking her hand he moved toward the wall. She looked over her shoulder to catch a glance from Frank, but his eyes were still fixed on the ground, and he stood motionless. Quick as a fawn she leapt from Lee's side, and throwing her arms round Frank's neck, cried out loud in a tone mingled of anguish and pity and passion, 'I love you!' and he, reanimated by that shout, whispered as Lee snatched her away, 'I'll watch here all night.' That gave her new hope too. She would come to him by some means or other; and she felt so contented as Lee helped her over the wall, and led her in silence to the house, that she wondered at herself.

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCLUSION

It was nearly eleven o'clock. Lee, Briscoe, Miss Jane, Dempster and Muriel were all in the dining-room, and Dempster was making a speech. It will possibly never be known whether Miss Jane put him up to it or not; if she did she regretted it before he was half done.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he began, with turgid tongue and desiccated throat, 'you are surprised that I should wish at this late hour to detain you with anything in the shape of a formal speech, however informal it may be.' The introductory sentence had been prepared. 'But,' he continued, staunching a wriggle, 'I—I have something to say. Mr Chartres, I am neither a Communist nor a Nihilist'—

this was to have been a side flourish, but out it came first—‘still I would like to remark, in reference to a talk we had this afternoon, that I am of opinion that, if fortunes were things to be inherited by everybody, it might on the whole be better—eh—ah—or worse for society, taking into consideration the fact that wealth produces idleness, and idleness folly, and—eh—ah—sin, it might be better that most people should have to make their fortunes. Eh—ah—I am overwhelmed with a feeling such as one experiences when one gets something one didn’t expect. Comfort, Mr Chartres, is the greatest necessity of existence—I mean that to be comfortable is always of the greatest consequence, indeed, I may say, the very backbone—eh—ah—of comfort.’

Now there is never the remotest necessity for speech-making, at least in private, although it is daily perpetrated, and unfailingly by wholly incompetent parties. It is like singing in this respect; only those who cannot care to perform. Human nature will

never get past it; for there is a law which ordains that whatever one is unfit for must be attempted, especially out of season. What one can't do is the all-important thing. So Dempster reeled on, undeterred by the blank looks of his auditors, and an ominous sparkle in Miss Jane's eye—his body a mere thoroughfare of uninterrupted transmigration for the spirits of all things that crawl and squirm and twist and wriggle.

'And I am now, I am happy to say, exceedingly comfortable. After Muriel refused me I was like a ship in a storm, and so I put into the first port—eh—ah—I mean that I have found a comfortable haven, and I am sure Jane will make a very good wife.'

Amazement stared from every eye, including Miss Jane's. She tried to simper in a dignified manner—but what was the man saying?'

'She is like old wine—eh—ah'—he felt Miss Jane's eyes scorching him like burning glasses. 'The difference between our ages—eh—ah—' he was now perspiring freely. 'The disadvantage of marrying a girl like

Muriel is, that when she grows old'—he made a little halt here, but he was too far gone to draw back; over he went, head first—'when she grows old one would miss her beauty. The great advantage is that one can never miss what has never been there, and—I'll not be interrupted!' mopping his head, and gyrating fiercely; but not daring to meet again Miss Jane's eye, one full glance of which had been more than enough.

'There's nobody interrupting you, my dear Mr Dempster,' said Lee. 'But is it true that you are going to marry my sister?'

'It is—I am!' defiantly, as if he were challenging himself to take so much as one step in an opposite direction.

'I'm very glad. An episode of this kind is refreshing. So unlikely, too. One daren't have introduced it into written fiction; but here it has cropped up most beautifully in our little creation. Really, I am much obliged to you both. Now you must allow me to go upstairs and attend to the matters there.'

As soon as Lee had reached the house

with Muriel he had gone straight to the room in which Henry Chartres lay ; but when he was about to enter, a swift descending step on the stair caught his ear, and drew him away just in time to intercept Briscoe, who had finally determined that, wherever he might go, he must leave Snell House that night. Lee peremptorily bade him stay, or he would accuse him of robbery, and send in pursuit ; and Briscoe was forced to submit. Lee had been about to ascend the stair again, when Dempster importunately demanded his presence in the dining-room. The latter having made his remarkable communication, Lee intended to arrange with Briscoe some definite plan of action ; but another delay took place.

On opening the door of the dining-room, Lee was met by Clacher, whom everybody had forgotten.

'Good evening,' said Clacher, doing it 'Englified,' and walking into the room. His face was streaming with perspiration ; his eyes were wild with drink and insanity ; his hair hung in wisps about his face.



‘Ladies and gentlemen, I am Robert Chartres,’ he said. He had remembered what he wanted to do ‘Englified.’

‘I am Bonnie Prince Charlie too,’ he added, after a pause. ‘I don’t understand it. I’m afraid I’m mad, but I’m not a fool. I am Robert Chartres.’

Everybody looked at Lee.

He said, ‘I don’t remember being so intensely interested in my life. How can you possibly hope to succeed in this imposture, Clacher?’

‘You’re an imposture,’ cried Clacher, fiercely, staggering a little. ‘I’m mad, but I’m no jist a fule, an’ naebody daur harm me. Ach!’ he hissed, grinding his teeth and shaking his wild hair, enraged at himself for failing to do it ‘Englified.’ ‘I am Robert Chartres,’ he shouted, throwing back his head. ‘The estate’s entailed, and it’s mine. I’m Bonnie Prince Charlie too,’ he added, more quietly.

‘Take a seat,’ said Lee. ‘Let us all sit down again.’

Clacher stumbled into a chair. Miss Jane

forgave Dempster with her eyes, and they sat on a couch together. Muriel stood beside a window with one hand wrapped in the curtain. Briscoe sat opposite Lee, who threw himself back on a large chair on one side of the fireplace. Clacher's chair was against the wall, not far from the door.

'Jane,' said Lee, 'I find no resemblance between this gentleman and Robert. Do you?'

'Not the slightest,' said Miss Jane.

'Do you, Muriel?'

'None.'

'Well, friend,' said Lee, turning to Clacher.

'What have you to say now?'

'I am Robert Chartres.'

'But none of us recognise you. Recall yourself to our memories in some way.'

'Oh, I'm Bonnie Prince Charlie too.'

'That only indicates that you are mad; and a very ordinary madness it is. I am sure there are two or three Bonnie Prince Charlies in every lunatic asylum in Scotland.'

'I'm mad, an' naebody daur harm me,' growled Clacher.

'You remember Robert's escapade when he was a boy, Henry?' said Miss Jane.

'To which do you refer? There were so many,' said Lee.

'Oh, not so very many,' said Miss Jane.

'I mean the Inverkip Glen affair.'

'I can't say I do remember it.'

'Oh, you must. You weren't here at the time; but you knew all about it.'

Lee sat up, and swiftly changed his look of anxiety into a far-reaching glance at the past.

'Ah, yes!' he said, dropping back in his chair again.

'Clacher must have heard about it,' said Miss Jane.

'I shouldn't wonder,' said Lee. 'Clacher, do you know about the Inverkip Glen affair?'

'Of course. I'm Robert Chartres. I'm Clacher too, and Bonnie Prince Charlie. I don't know how.'

'Then,' said Lee, 'just tell us about it. Your acquaintance with it may be evidence of your identity.'

‘The Inverkip Glen business?’ said Clacher. ‘A’body kens that. Damn!’ he growled at the Scotch.

‘Let us see, now,’ said Lee. ‘Have you any details that could only be known to Robert and his family?’

‘Inverkip Glen,’ said Clacher. ‘When I was fourteen or thereabouts, I went away wi’ a wheen laddies an’ hid in it for twa-three days. I ca’ed mysel’ Prince Charlie, an’ the ithers wis cheeftans—Lochiel an’ Glengarry, ye ken. We fought the servants that wis sent tae bring us hame, an’ they had tae send the polis tae fetch us.’

This was spoken very haltingly, and ended with a savage oath at his own inability to speak correctly.

‘He could have learned all that in the village,’ said Miss Jane.

Lee rose, leant gracefully against the mantelpiece, and addressed Clacher.

‘Clacher,’ he said, ‘you have unwittingly undertaken a work of art, and for that you deserve high commendation. You have aspired ; you have done your best. That is

sufficient. Success is the only failure. A compassable aim is an inferior one. Ideals cease to be when realised. Better succeed in a constant endeavour after the highest, than fail in aspiration to achieve a result as splendid as any which history records. These platitudes are not by any means beside the question, although you don't understand them.'

Here Lee shifted from his easy pose, and stood firmly on his feet.

'Whatever besides madness,' he continued, 'may have led you to attempt this imposture, is no concern of mine. I am only sorry for your sake and my own that you cannot continue it further. Variety, if not the soul, is certainly the body of fiction. I hope that, although you must go out of our story shortly, at least in your present capacity, you, or someone else in your sphere of life, may be enmeshed in this web of circumstance which I help fate to weave. My brother Robert is at present upstairs. He arrived here this evening.'

Lee looked at all his auditors severally,

thoroughly enjoying the effect of this extraordinary news.

‘Oh, dear! Oh, dear!’ cried Clacher, weakly, tedding his hair and fidgeting on his seat. ‘Naebody daur harm me, I’m mad.’

‘Set your mind at rest, Clacher. Nobody will attempt to harm you.’

‘Jane,’ he continued, ‘it was our unfortunate brother whom we carried upstairs this evening. The woman was his wife.’

Briscoe gasped; but the practical novelist proceeded, smiling, and proud of his ingenuity.

‘He has been going by the name of Lee, Maxwell Lee,’ he said, staring down Briscoe; and makes a scanty living by his pen. His wife is a noble woman, and will not admit his madness; but that he is mad no one else can have any doubt, because the poor fellow imagines that he is me. I will tell you his whole history to-morrow, as far as I know it. I hadn’t the remotest idea he was in Scotland until he appeared to-night—’

The droning of a bagpipe not far off, a strange sound at that time of night and in

the neighbourhood, interrupted him. A very unskilful attempt at a pibroch succeeded, and as the playing grew more distinct it was evident that the performer approached the house. Muriel raised the window-sash, and the tuneless screaming ceased. Hesitating steps on the gravel were then heard. They stopped opposite the window, and a high, cracked male voice quavered out the first verse of Glen's pathetic ballad, 'Wae's me for Prince Charlie':—

' A wee bird cam tae oor ha' door,  
He warbl't sweet an' clearly ;  
An' aye the o'ercome o' his sang  
Was "Wae's me for Prince Charlie."  
O ! when I heard the bonnie, bonnie bird,  
'The tears came drappin' rarely ;  
I took my bonnet off my head,  
For weel I lo'ed Prince Charlie !'

The voice broke entirely at the last line. Said Lee, 'We'll bring this minstrel in,' and left the room. In a few seconds he returned, accompanied by a strange figure. It was that of an old man dressed in a ragged Highland costume. His kilt was of the Stuart

tartan. His black jacket had been garnished with brass buttons ; but of them only a few hung here and there, withered and mouldy ; and numerous little tufts of thread on pocket-lids and cuffs and breast showed whence their companions had been shed. His sporran was half-denuded of hair. His hose were holed, and the uppers were parting company with the soles of his shoes. A black feather adorned in a very broken-backed manner his Glengarry bonnet. His pipes he had left in the hall.

There was nothing remarkable in the dress. Such are to be seen any day in the Trongate of Glasgow, the Canongate of Edinburgh, at fairs, or wherever the wandering piper may turn a penny. It was the bearing of the wearer and the cast of his countenance which commanded attention. As he entered the room he threw back his head, inclining it a little to the left side ; his dim grey eyes lightened fitfully, and his gait had something of majesty. He advanced slowly, but without hesitation, and took the seat Lee had vacated.



Of all those in the room Clacher's face indicated the greatest interest.

'Friends,' said the new-comer, keeping on his bonnet, and shaking back his long, grey hair, which hung almost to his shoulders, 'I can trust you. "Nowhere beats the heart so kindly as beneath the tartan plaid." You haven't the tartans on, and that is right, for they might betray you. There's a law against the tartan. I wear it in defiance of the law.'

'Wha are ye, man?' cried Clacher, his face undergoing a sudden illumination.

'Do you not know me?' said the stranger. 'You will be true. It is a great sum. Ten thousand pounds. All my own friends have forgotten me. It is strange, strange. I am changed, I know. I am Bonnie Prince Charlie.'

'Ha, ha!' screamed Clacher, 'ha, ha, ha!'

'Two of them,' whispered Dempster to himself, rigid with amazement.

'You astonish me,' said Lee, with perfect composure.

'It is sad, I know. I sleep in the woods,

and visit the towns at night. My home is in the bracken. I remember I lived here in 'forty-five. I thought I would revisit the old place to-night. Is not this Scone Palace?'

'No; this is Snell House.'

'Ah! I lived there too, once. But can you tell me this. Why do they accuse me of unfaithfulness? "Flora, when thou wert beside me!" Oh, her eyes were warm and mild like the summer, and her voice made me weep. It is shameful what they say about me. I never loved another.'

Clacher, looking absolutely hideous in his excitement, rushed from his chair, oversetting a small table, and planting himself firmly before the wondering piper, shouted, 'You are Bonnie Prince Charlie.'

'I am. Do me no harm.'

'Then you are Robert Chartres, and you did not commit suicide.'

'I am hungry,' said the Prince.

Clacher pulled from his breast-pocket the crumpled letter he had studied so devoutly in the library, and handing it to Miss Jane, cried: 'It's a' up noo. I took that letter

frae Maister Willum Chartres's pooch whan I fand his corp'. Read it, an' ye'll ken my plot. Gosh, it was a mad yin! Oh, I'm no jist a fule! Naebody daur harm me. An' you, ye scoon'ereel,' he screamed, springing behind Lee, and pinning his arms to his body with a hug like a bear's, 'ye're mad, ye're mad. I've turn't the tables on ye, I'm thinking.'

Lee struggled strongly ; but Briscoe came to Clacher's help.

'Peter!' exclaimed Lee.

'It's all up, as Clacher says. Every man for himself,' muttered Briscoe. But he wouldn't look Lee in the face.

'You've spoiled a great scene, Peter,' was all Lee said.

'And who is the man upstairs?' asked Muriel, advancing from the window.

'You'll get the key of the bedroom in which he is in this pocket,' said Briscoe, indicating by an uncouth gesture a pocket in his coat, as he did not wish to release his hold on Lee.

Muriel took the key and left the room.

Miss Jane read and re-read the letter given her by Clacher, and was still considering it when Muriel returned with her father. He was not long awake, and had to be supported by his daughter. Miss Jane recognised him at once and kissed his cheek. There was no exclaiming. When they came out of it they would know from their exhaustion how excited they had been. The tears stood in Muriel's eyes, and her face was very pale, but serenity marked every lineament.

'Where is Mrs Lee?' asked Henry Chartres, when he had got seated.

At that moment Caroline entered the room. She had remained in the bedroom Lee had appropriated, afraid lest her interference might precipitate some rash act on the part of her husband or her brother; but the bagpipes, the singing, the opening and shutting of doors, and the loud voices downstairs intimated a crisis of some kind, and she had concluded at last to have a share in it, hoping to prevent disaster to her husband, as she judged from the noise that

his control of circumstances had come to an end. As Caroline entered, the two gardeners and the coachman appeared at the door, Muriel having sent for them at her father's request.

Muriel looked at Mrs Lee for a second or two as if debating some question with herself, and then noiselessly left the room. She couldn't keep Frank waiting any longer.

'Maxwell Lee,' said Henry Chartres, 'for your wife's sake you go scot free. She has told me all about you. As for you, Peter Briscoe, your present action shows what you are. Take him and duck him well in the horse-pond.'

The coachman and the gardeners, nothing loth, approached Briscoe; but Lee, having regained his liberty, put himself before his brother-in-law in an attitude of defence.

'I beg you, sir, not to insist on this,' he said in a passion of intercession; 'it is mere revenge. I entreat you.'

'But he betrayed you,' said Chartres.

'Well, I suppose the world puts it that

way. But he merely acted independently and without due consideration. That has been the fault of this work all along: the principal collaborateurs have been too frequently out of harmony. Since he has chosen to bring our story to a sudden end in this way, I have no right to complain. Do not damage your character for magnanimity which these events have developed so remarkably—a result very gratifying to me—by a petty revenge on my brother-in-law.'

Chartres signed to the servants to retire. 'You are a strange man,' he said.

'Miss Chartres,' said Lee, 'in token that you cherish no deep-rooted feeling against me, will you oblige me by reading that letter?'

Miss Jane looked at her brother; he assented, and she read:—

'MY DEAR WILLIAM,—You will be astonished, not very agreeably, I am afraid, to learn that I am still in the land of the living. I have been in a state of abject

poverty for years. I will not trouble you with the particulars of my wretched career. I have burnt up my stomach with drink. Insanity has addled my brain. I am a beggar, and go about the country—I am ashamed to say it for your sake—playing the bagpipes. In my mad fits I have repeatedly tried to commit suicide. At present I am quite sane; the only difficulty I have is to reconcile my being Robert Chartres with the fact that I am also Bonnie Prince Charlie. I write this in London; and I am going to start at once and at last to try and come to you. It would be better to kill myself; but I am too great a coward when I am sane. I want to enjoy comfort once more before I die. If I do not reach you within a month after this letter, I think you may conclude that I am dead.— I am, your brother,

‘ROBERT CHARTRES.’

All eyes turned on the writer of the letter. He was fast asleep in his chair, smiling like a child.

